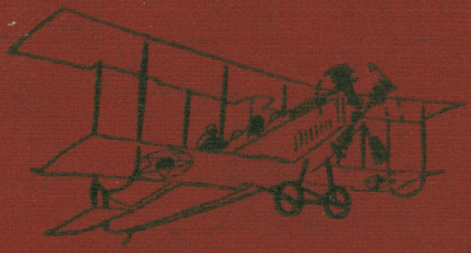
RUSS FARRELL, AIRMAN



THOMSON BURTIS

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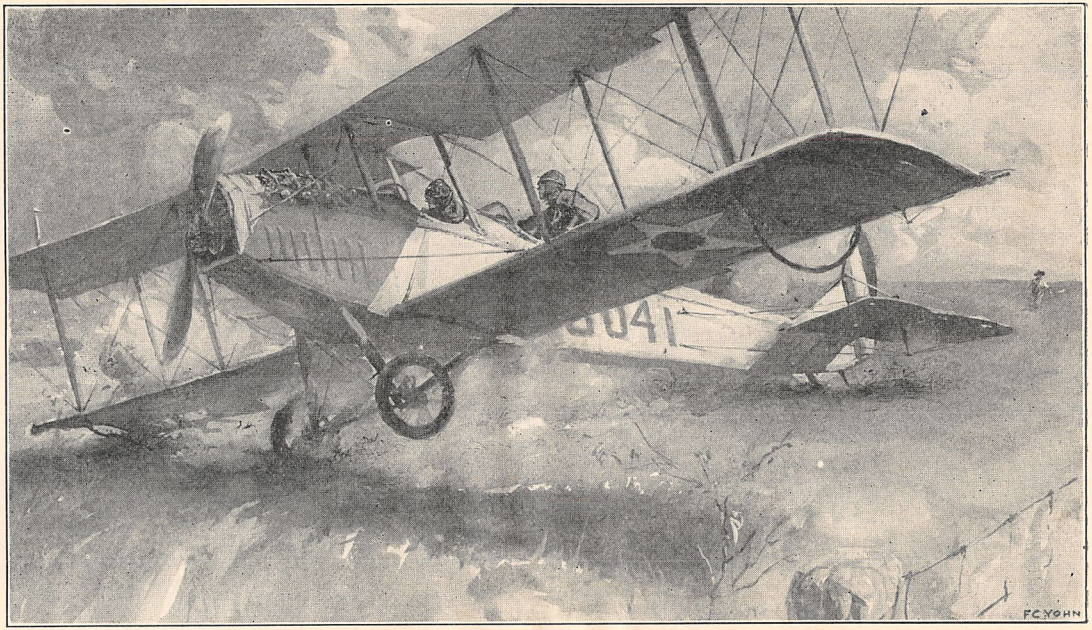

The tailskid ripped into the ground, and one tire burst with a loud report.

RUSS FARRELL, AIRMAN

BY

THOMSON BURTIS

FRONTISPIECE
BY
F. C. YOHN

GARDEN CITY NEW YOKK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1927

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RUSS FARRELL, AIRMAN

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CADET'S CONQUEST

FIVE young fellows in khaki were seated on one of the benches that faced the biggest flying field in the world. The white hatbands around their olive-drab campaign hats were the only insignia to distinguish them from ordinary enlisted men in the United States Army Air Service. Those white bands, however, told the world that they were flying cadets.

Russell Farrell—"Russ" or "Rusty" for short—sat on the end of the bench and watched all that went on about him with shining eyes. It is not given to every man to consummate a life-long ambition—and Russ, as he expressed it, had been a "nut" about flying since the fascination of it had overcome him years before.

Pervading the air and undertoning the voices of the excited cadets was a deep bass hum that was like the drone of monster insects. A hundred ships were drawn up on the line, paralleling the mile-long row of white hangars which edged the northern boundary of Donovan Field. Their motors were rumbling

along on the warm-up as mechanics in the cockpits bent low to handle the throttles and listen for the slightest miss in the rhythm of the great eight-cylinder engines. Mechanics in blue denim coveralls and greasy hats swarmed on the line, preparing their ships for the day's work.

As if in sympathy with Rusty's nervous eagerness, the roar of the motors grew in volume; the ships strained against the wheel blocks which held them, and the propellers commenced revolving so swiftly that they were invisible save for the line of light traced by their metal tips. It was all in tune with Farrell's racing thoughts and half-nervous, half-delighted anticipations. The squadron of cadets—twenty-two of them—had just finished the fierce ordeal of ground school, and had arrived at Donovan Field the night before. Consequently it was all new to them, and they drank in the scene with eyes that could not get their fill.

Rusty's gaze concentrated on the ship to which the five of them had been assigned, with a Lieutenant Ridgeway as instructor. They had not see him yet. The sergeant was turning off the motor now—evidently the warm-up was over.

He heard little Gerard talking about how simple a matter it was to fly.

"Don't believe there'll be anything to it," he finished with assumed carelessness.

"Well, I'll admit I'm on pins and needles right now!" stated Russ. He was the youngest man in the

group, having just passed his eighteenth birthday. Big, slouching Perkins, next to him, was close to thirty. "Boy, I've been waiting for this day since I was knee-high to a grasshopper. I expect I'll be scared the first few times up, but after that——"

"Well, others seem to live through it, so I guess we will," Perkins drawled philosophically.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" Russ exclaimed suddenly, and hopped to his feet. "There's a fellow from my home town!" And he made for a big mechanic.

"Hello there, Flags!" he shouted.

Mr. Flagstead Gadley was plainly surprised. His hulking body, big and heavy-shouldered, straightened, and he pushed his floppy blue hat back from a red face that was covered with a stubble of beard.

"For the love o' Mike, Farrell, what're you doing here?" he inquired.

The smile on his face was not a pleasant one as he looked Russ up and down with his small green eyes.

"Just got in last night," Russ told him. "I knew you went in the Air Service——"

He stopped suddenly, a trifle embarrassed. Gadley was the son of old Jacob Gadley, one of Bluefield's most prominent merchants, and the Bluefield paper had announced with big headlines that Flagstead Gadley had enlisted as a flying cadet. To find him here as a mechanic meant that he had failed to make the grade as a candidate for a commission as a flying officer.

Gadley laughed loudly.

"I stood being kicked around as a cadet until I got sick of it," he proclaimed. "Life's too short to crawl on your belly and lick the boots of a bunch of guys with bars on their shoulders, all for the sake of breakin' your neck as a flyer."

"All according to the point of view," grinned Russ. "Well, it's good to run into one of the old gang, anyway. Funny you're working on my ship, isn't it?"

As he spoke he was aware that Flags had changed a good deal since the days when he had played a good game of football at Bluefield High School. He was flabby, now, and he looked overfed.

"Well, you got a sweet time coming to *you!*" announced Flags with relish. "They're kicking kaydets out of here faster'n the ground schools can turn 'em out. I s'pose you'd be all broke up if you couldn't go back to Bluefield with wings across your chest and pretty bars on your shoulders. Think of the treat Main Street'd miss——"

He stopped suddenly and then turned around and hurried over toward the ship. Another mechanic dived into the cockpit, and Flags began twisting the propeller.

Russ, whose eyes had hardened slightly at Flags' sneering words, looked around. A slim young officer had detached himself from the group of instructors who had emerged from Hangar 11, and was walking toward the bench. An unstrapped helmet was on his head, and the side-flaps of it swung casually beside his face. Tinted goggles were pushed

up on his forehead, and he held a paper in his hand. Russ hurried over to the bench.

"Your handsome friend from the old home town seemed a little jealous, according to what I could overhear by careful eavesdropping," grunted Perkins in his deliberate, smiling way. "Got busted, didn't he? I——"

"Sh-h-h-h! I think this is Lieutenant Ridgeway," cautioned Russ, and five heads turned simultaneously and five pairs of eyes met the level scrutiny of their instructor.

Their eyes never left him as he walked the few steps toward the bench. Here was the man from whom they were to learn the fundamentals of flying, and who would have their lives in his skilful hands. Not only that, but on his word hung their destiny at Donovan Field. A few written words or a verbal report from him could send them home—failures.

Russ, aware of all this, was conscious of the fact that he would not hesitate to place himself in the hands of the wide-shouldered, long-legged young man who was standing in front of them, the hint of a smile on his saturnine face. His gray eyes sloped downward a trifle on each side of a thin, jutting nose. His cheekbones were high, and underneath them the cheeks were flat and lean. There was a sardonic cast to the thin, bony face, but it was relieved by a slight twinkle in Ridgeway's eyes as he looked over his cadets.

He called the roll quickly. Russ answered, "Here,

sir!" to his name almost before Ridgeway had pronounced it. The instructor raised his eyes briefly to Farrell's face, and it seemed that the twinkle in them deepened. Perhaps he understood the mental attitude of a cadet about to take his first hop.

A dozen ships were now in the air, and others were scudding across the mile-square field on the take-off. Trucks trundled up and down the roads, and mechanics were busy as bees in a flower garden. The cadets, however, had no eyes for anything but Ridgeway as he folded the paper and put it in his pocket.

"Farrell first, and then the rest of you in alphabetical order," he stated. He spoke with crisp finality. "This field has just been changed to a Gosport Field, meaning that I'll take you through the various stages of flying, right up to the time you get your commissions, myself, instead of your changing instructors on each stage. I've got to suffer with you until you get discharged, or get your wings."

He smiled slightly, and a scar on one cheek sprang into relief and gave his face an aspect of benevolent mockery.

"To-day you get a joy-ride. Don't try to learn anything. Relax, force yourself to sit loose and easy, and don't let yourself perch up there stiff as a poker and hanging on for dear life. All right, Farrell."

Russ leaped to his feet, and walked beside Ridgeway toward the ship. His nervously fumbling

fingers made a poor job of strapping his helmet beneath his chin. Ridgeway gave his first passenger a detailed scrutiny as they made for the ship, as befits an instructor whose safety is almost as dependent on the nerve and poise of his cadet as the student's is on his instructor's skill. A panic-stricken cadet can "freeze" the controls close to the ground and crash despite all efforts of the veteran in the front seat.

What Ridgeway saw was satisfactory—unusually so. Russ was lean and rangy, and possessed a chest and a pair of shoulders which would have been a credit to any man. His Irish blood showed in his short, slightly uptilted nose, sprinkled with freckles, and two bright blue eyes which were at present glowing with a veritable flame of excited anticipation. There was an effect of tingling vitality and abounding health about him—the whites of his eyes were clear, and the color in his face was the warm pink of perfect condition below a smooth skin that seemed aglow with life. His wide mouth was tightened grimly as he gathered himself together for the trip.

"The first thing to remember is *always* to inspect your ship," came Ridgeway's voice. "Begin at some designated point, like the tail-surfaces, go over the whole crate, and don't miss anything."

Russ followed Ridgeway around. He noticed Flags Gadley leaning against the leading edge of the left wing, idly spinning a wrench. The crew chief was still in the cockpit, waiting for the lieutenant to

take possession. Flags grinned contemptuously as his eyes met Farrell's, as though belittling the strained concentration with which Russ was inspecting every tiny cotter-pin.

Ridgeway caught the gesture, and spoke sharply.

"What is there about an inspection that tickles *you* so much, Gadley?" he snapped. "Let me tell you this: after these last three weeks when you've been a mechanic on my ship, I never expect to see a ship that needs inspection more! Wipe that smile off your face and get on the wing-tip, where you belong!"

Gadley leaped to his post, his face like a thundercloud. Russ was not greatly surprised to find that Flags did not rate very highly as a mechanic. He had never been noted for industry or propriety back in Bluefield. It must have been gall and wormwood to him to have received that bawling out in front of someone from his home town. He wasn't a fellow that would admit his own shortcomings.

However, Flags and his troubles were unimportant things just then. Russ put one foot on each side of the control stick, and strapped the wide canvas belt tightly around him. He could feel the ship quiver slightly under the lazily firing motor. Ridgeway leaned over the side of the cockpit. He pointed to a handle on the right side.

"That's the throttle," he stated. "Don't touch it to-day. Over here on the left is the spark, if you don't know that already. Keep your feet flat on

the floor, your hands on the top of the cowling so they won't be bothering the stick or the throttle. Don't even watch the instruments. Enjoy yourself."

Russ placed his goggles over his eyes as Ridgeway climbed in the front cockpit; Gadley was at his station on a wing-tip. Sergeant Wiggins was at the other wing. The throttle crept forward under Russ's fascinated eyes, and the motor's roar was deafening. The oil-pressure needle crept upward, and the tachometer, which shows the number of motor revolutions per minute, indicated r. p. m. of twelve hundred. The thermometer showed a temperature of seventy centigrade.

When Russ raised his head a trifle, the terrific blast of air from the propeller was like a solid substance forcing his head backward. The frail plane quivered like a leaf in the wind as it strained forward, but the wheel blocks and the mechanics held it. Then the roar died away, Ridgeway nodded, and Wiggins disappeared under the wings to pull the blocks.

The instructor pointed to Flags, and then back to Russ. Flags approached the ship and leaned over to inspect the belt which Russ had strapped over his knees.

He put his lips close to the earpiece of Russ's helmet.

"You're white as a sheet right now. When you get sick up there remember you'll have to clean off the ship when you get down!" he said, a sneer in his

voice. "All right—we've got the little kaydet all tucked in!"

He hopped off the plane, grinning derisively. The next moment the ship swept around to the right, Wiggins holding the left wing to help the rudder carry it around, and then Russ felt the plane flatten beneath him as the stick went slightly forward and the tailskid ceased to scrape the ground. Faster and faster it trundled and bumped across the ground, and then, with miraculous suddenness, the riding became smooth and he knew he was in the air.

The ground went past with dizzying speed, and the motor roared along with a rhythmic bellow that was already making his ears ring. He gripped the cowling on either side of the cockpit, and sat there in tense expectancy. The earth seemed to melt away beneath him.

Suddenly he was gripping the left-hand cowling with both hands as the ship tilted to the right. It was a bank to make a turn, he knew, but nevertheless he felt as though he must slide off to the right. Soon the ship straightened again, and drove along upward in a gradual climb.

The hangars grew smaller and smaller, and finally it seemed that Donovan Field was only a brown blanket on the ground. Ships taxiing across its surface looked like crawling insects, and the three white lines of buildings on the northern edge of the field were like so many rows of dolls' houses. Russ was uncomfortable and ill at ease; there was a queer

feeling in the pit of his stomach, and it did not seem that he could even think with that awful roar in his ears. Nevertheless, his heart leaped with the knowledge that he was in the air—and that the fact that the altimeter showed nearly a half mile of altitude didn't keep him from looking down. There had been a tiny fear in his heart that the height would affect him, but he found that the moving ship made an entirely different kind of lookout than the top of a high building. The world beneath him seemed like a scene painted on canvas, and the fact that he was moving along above it seemed to take away all sensation of height. He felt no touch of dizziness nor the desire to throw himself into space.

Without the slightest warning, save a sputter or two, the pandemonium of the motor gave way to what seemed like dead silence. He glanced at the throttle, but it was still pushed as far ahead as it would go. As his dazed eyes rested on it the lever snapped back. He looked at Ridgeway, a few feet ahead of him, and saw him bend forward. Then the forward-leaning body of the pilot gave him a clear view of the motor ahead, and stark horror leaped into his eyes.

The ship nosed downward at that moment—he realized dimly that Ridgeway had pushed forward on the stick to keep flying speed—and he saw blue flame playing over the entire surface of the motor. The dive of the ship enveloped him with a wave of withering heat.

Ridgeway snapped to an upright position, and the next second the ship seemed to shoot upward and to be turning on its back. It was banked up on the left wing until the lifting surfaces were at right angles to the ground half a mile below. It hung there for a moment, and then a terrific blast of air struck him on the left cheek and blew his goggles around. But the terrible heat was gone, and the flame was shooting away from them, straight up into the air.

With a death-like grip on the right-hand cowling and his eyes glued to the burning motor, Russ's numbed brain realized what had happened. The information gained in his ground-school days automatically furnished the explanation. The gasoline feedline had broken somewhere, causing the motor to stop—and the gasoline, spraying over the hot motor, had caught fire. Ridgeway had been turning off the gas petcock before he had realized that fire had already broken out, and had delayed going into the terrific sideslip which now seemed to be tearing his head from his shoulders as the ship dropped earthward.

Banked as steeply as the ship was, it had no lifting surface whatever in comparison to its weight, and it catapulted downward with such speed that the draught fairly tore the breath from Rusty's nostrils. Ignorant as he was of actual flying, he nevertheless realized the glorious skill of Ridgeway's flying as he grimly held the plane in that slip. If it ever got away from the pilot—even if the nose should drop a

bit—the airstream back over the ship would result in the flimsy linen and seasoned wood springing into flame. As it was, with the draught coming from the side, the flame was driven upward, alongside the right wing. The linen of the upper wing was smouldering already, and the center-section strut directly over the rear of the motor was slowly charring.

The wires whined shrilly with the speed, and the ship vibrated terrifically. Russ had to fight for breath, and his world was a red-tinted nightmare more horrible than any dream could possibly be. For what seemed like an eternity his staring eyes watched the smouldering linen on the leading edge of the upper wing. At any second he might be the center of a furnace of flame, and he fought to control the utter panic that gripped him. But one tangible thing stood between him and destruction—and that was the motionless, inscrutable man before him. Ridgeway had not turned his head. He sat there flying for his life—and for Rusty's—with the fatalistic calm and uncanny skill of a veteran at the work for which he was supremely fitted. The helmeted head before him became the center of Russ's universe.

The ship straightened with a suddenness that made him sick and weak. He was conscious of surprise at the fact that the ground was close below them, but he forgot that as he threw his hand before his face to ward off the fiery breath of the melting motor. It was not as bad as he had expected, and

then he saw that the fire had been blown out. The next second, though, that wonderful feeling of having been snatched back to life from an infinitely horrible death was forgotten. The ship wavered, and the right wing, despite Ridgeway's desperate attempt to jockey the ship and keep it level, dropped. Enough of the linen had been burned away to decrease the lifting surface on that wing. For a few reeling seconds the ship slipped and fluttered downward. Then there came the rending crash of the splintering wood and tearing linen, and Russ lost consciousness.

When he opened his eyes he was lying on the ground. A group of mechanics, cadets and flyers, were in a circle around him, and an ambulance stood close by, hiding his view of the scrambled heap of wreckage which had been a ship. A kind-faced, bespectacled doctor was bending over him, and Ridgeway stood looking down at him.

It was a joy to be alive, and as he remembered the crowded moments which seemed like a dream he sat up. To his surprise there was nothing the matter with his legs or arms, and save for a slight dizziness he seemed to be all together.

"You're O. K., son," nodded the doctor.

Ridgeway's cool gray eyes probed Russ's steadily, and the white scar on his cheek deepened in that curiously mocking smile. The instructor's forehead was decorated with a strip of courtplaster, and there was a smear of dried blood on his cheek.

"Did you enjoy your ride, Farrell?" he inquired.

Russ checked the answer he would have given, and essayed a rather uncertain smile.

"It—was a bit warm, sir," he answered.

He noticed that a dozen or more ships were droning through the air above him. Far away over Field One a half dozen more were stunting on the acrobatic stage. It seemed that the field was still going about its work as though nothing had happened. Come to think about it, probably most of the men on it did not even know that he and Ridgeway had just escaped being killed——

"Run along and get the other crate warmed up, Wiggins!" came Ridgeway's voice, and he saw the veteran sergeant make off across the field toward the line.

He got to his feet, and the onlookers started to melt away. Some officers were asking questions of Ridgeway, who answered them in a bored manner. The doctor clapped him on the shoulder, smiled cheerily, hopped in the ambulance, and scooted away. He looked around, but could find none of the cadets of his own squadron there. Perhaps, being raw recruits, they had not been allowed to come over. Flags was not to be seen, either. He looked at the heap of débris, in the center of which was a blackenened motor, and shuddered.

Ridgeway turned toward him.

"Let's go, youngster," he remarked, and they walked across the field together, staying close to the edge in order to keep out of the way of the ships

which were constantly landing. A big wrecking truck, manned with several mechanics, trundled down the field toward the crashed ship.

"Listen, Farrell," said Ridgeway. "That was your first ride. It was a pretty rotten experience for you, and not a pleasant one for me. Unless you're a freak you're worse scared of ships now than you ever will be again, because all you know about flying now is that you came close to breaking your neck in one of the crates. There's only one way to get back your confidence, and that's to fly your fear out of you. The other ship'll be warmed by the time we get to the line. I won't force you—but I'd advise you to take a little hop with me right away."

Russ could scarcely believe his ears. The impersonal, matter-of-fact way in which the business of the field was proceeding seemed to him cruel and inhuman. Here he had just gone through an experience which was almost the last word in horror—a crushed ship was lying out there on the field as mute evidence of all that had happened—and yet the vast machinery of Donovan Field kept on turning, never even hesitating in the presence of disaster. A hundred men were in the air at this moment; mechanics were working busily; Ridgeway was about to continue his morning's work as though nothing had happened!

It was his first glimpse into the spirit of the service of which he desired so ardently to be a part. Something of the subordination of self in the ac-

complishment of the greater thing, and the dawning comprehension of the fundamental qualities necessary in the makeup of an Air Service man came to Russ in that moment as he and Ridgeway walked down the line in the flooding sunlight, with the hazardous routine of the air going on all about them. And despite the fact that his brain was still numb and dazed with his recent experience, and that the horror of it still gripped him, he rose to the occasion.

"You know best, sir," he said quietly, although his face had not yet resumed its wonted color and the freckles stood out plainly against his bloodless skin. "I'm ready any time."

"You won't make any mistake," nodded Ridgeway, and started humming a little tune as they walked along.

He was given no time to talk to Perkins or the rest of the bunch. The ship was ready when they arrived at Bench 6, and within thirty seconds Ridgeway was sending it skimming across the field. The last thing Russ remembered clearly was Flags Gadley's utterly surprised face as he saw the two men get in the ship.

The short ten-minute ride was a long-drawn-out torture for Russ. Although he reviled himself bitterly for a chicken-livered coward, his fascinated eyes would not leave the swift-working rocker-arms which were all he could see of the motor. At any second he expected to see flame lick over the engine, and the vibration of the ship was filled with terrible

possibilities. When the air bumps, which the rising sun was now causing, sent the ship up or down or tilted it sideward his heart behaved queerly. To him the frail craft in which he was riding was not strong enough to be trusted with human passengers, and the slightest of dives or zooms sent his heart into his mouth. The swoop downward for the landing, when the earth rushed up to meet them and it seemed that they must crash before Ridgeway leveled off, was an experience that left him white and shaking. It was relief beyond anything he had ever known when his two feet were firmly on the ground once more.

"Don't stay out here and talk—get into the barracks for the rest of the morning," commanded Ridgeway, and Russ obeyed orders.

At lunch, however, around the long table which fed thirty ravenous cadets, he was bombarded with questions, and had become a hero in the eyes of his squadron mates. That was pleasant, but even when his audience was most attentive and thrilled he could not forget the queer sinking sensation within him—that persistent, gnawing doubt. Was he afraid to fly? Would the time ever come when he could forget that one time when his ship had failed, and carry on?

He went out to fly next day with leaping hope contending against his misgivings, but the twenty minutes he spent in the air were far from encouraging. He and Ridgeway were connected with an ordinary rubber speaking tube, and he was allowed to handle the stick under the pilot's steady stream of

instruction. It was disconcerting to discover how the slightest movement of the controls was sufficient to make the plane do queer things, and how much like balancing on a tight-rope it was to keep the ship level. Not that he kept it level—he over-controlled all the time, and the ship bucked and slipped and skidded through the air in a manner that made even Ridgeway expostulate. And not for a moment could Russ forget his fear—his time in the air was one long period of dread that some disaster would send them hurtling downward.

When he climbed out of the plane, and helped the swaggering Gerard strap his belt, he found Flags by his side. As the ship swept around and took off, the big, flabby young mechanic looked at Russ with a loose-lipped smile.

"Pretty white around the gills, Farrell," he commented. "I'll give you about a week, or less. If you wasn't scared to death before, you got all the earmarks now."

"You sound as though you knew all about it," snapped Russ. "Is that the reason *you* got busted?"

The next second he was sorry to have twitted Gadley about his failure, but in his present mental condition he was not inclined to be either long-suffering or charitable. He walked away before Gadley could frame an answer, and did not see the expression in the green eyes that followed him.

Succeeding days were no better. He never reached the point where he felt at home in the air. He was

always preoccupied with the possibility that at any moment he would be plunged into another struggle with death. Ridgeway labored patiently with him, but to no avail. He watched Perk and the others outstrip him—they were swooping down over the hangars and learning to land while he was still trying desperately to handle a ship properly in the air. Perkins "soloed," or flew alone, on the day when Ridgeway gave Russ his first chance at landing—a chance which Russ messed up terribly. Gliding swiftly toward the earth, at seventy-five or eighty miles an hour, sent him into a panic, which even succeeding days of steady practice failed to overcome. The other four men in his class had all flown alone before Russ had even succeeded in leveling off three feet above the ground instead of ten or twelve, which he habitually did because the earth rushing up to meet him worked on his nerves so badly.

The other cadets, along with Ridgeway, were very considerate of him, and did not razz him for his slow progress. But Flags Gadley never gave him a moment's peace. Day after day he taunted Russ at every opportunity, and seemed to take a fiendish delight in watching him fall behind his comrades. As the others soloed while Russ was trying to conquer himself as well as the air, Flags' comments about Farrell's certain discharge and total inability to fly were calculated to dissipate what little self-confidence Russ had left. His awkward efforts to land could be plainly seen from the line, and gave Gadley an

opportunity to gather new material for his persistent persecution.

The reason for it was plain. Perkins summed it up in his slow, equable way; after Russ had sketched his acquaintance with Flags and the mechanic's career:

"There are a lot of people who're just naturally jealous of anybody else's success at anything. He fell down, and he'd be tickled to death to have you fall down, too."

Finally there came a morning, when the others had been soloing for three days or more each, when Gadley went too far. Ridgeway was standing by the ship, and Russ was walking toward it, strapping on his helmet. Flags met him, a few feet from the plane. He surveyed the cadet with a sneering smile.

"Maybe if you wore yellow goggles, instead of plain glass, it'd help you, Farrell. Keeps out the sun—and besides, yellow seems to be your color."

Russ's overwrought nerves snapped. He had taken a great deal from Flags, but in that second something snapped in his brain. Crack! the sound of the open-handed slap he landed resounded like the snap of a whip through the cool morning air.

He ducked the furious mechanic's wide right swing, and the next second had buried his fist in Gadley's well-rounded stomach. As always, a body blow is the most damaging to a man out of condition, and Flags went down. He got to his feet dizzily and Russ, his blue eyes hard and bright and his

face white with wrath, met him with a straight right which landed on the button—just alongside Gadley's unshaven chin.

He went down again, and Russ found himself struggling in Perkins' arms. Gadley stayed down this time. Ridgeway was looking on, an unreadable smile on his hawk-like face.

"Good boy!" breathed Perk, and released him.

"You're wasting time, Farrell," stated Ridgeway, and instinctively Russ comprehended that Ridgeway understood something of what was back of the brief fight.

"Take care of Gadley, sergeant," called Ridgeway over his shoulder.

Half a minute later Russ was taking off, the instructor sitting quietly in the front seat. His takeoff was slightly weaving—he over-controlled, as usual, on the rudder. When they got in the air and had made the first turn Ridgeway pointed up, and out over the mesquite which rimmed the field on three sides. Evidently they were going up for some more airwork, Russ thought, instead of practising landings. Well, he needed it.

Gradually the fierce satisfaction he felt in having thoroughly plastered Flags was forgotten in the old struggle with the air. He must conquer it—and himself. The opportunity to do the thing which all the adventurous blood of him had craved was in his grasp, and he was letting it slip through the fingers of a weakling.

They were three thousand feet high now, and he knew that in a moment his instructor's voice would begin to come through the speaking tube. The motor was pumping oil a bit, and his goggles were fogged, so he took his handkerchief from his shirt pocket to wipe them off. As he raised his arm the ship dove over a small lake, and the downward current of cool air—upward and downward currents of warm and cool air make what are wrongly called "air-pockets" and what airmen call "bumps"—made the ship drop downward as though it was an elevator. As always, any unusual happening in the air sent Russ into momentary panic, and the terrific propeller blast blew his handkerchief out of his temporarily loosened grasp.

He recovered himself quickly, and pulled back on the stick, for the ship had dropped into a dive during the interval. He tugged on it, but it would not come back, and the ship continued in the dive. As though sensing that something was wrong, Ridgeway looked around. Russ, momentarily puzzled, jerked again at the stick, and then he saw Ridgeway's eyes narrow to slits behind his goggles, and his mouth thin into a mere gash. With utter fear gripping him, Russ looked around, and in a flash came comprehension.

The airstream had blown his handkerchief back to the tail-surfaces, and by some freak of the current it had become wedged in the hinges of the elevators. They would not come up, any more than a door will close if a handkerchief is thrust in between it and the

jam. The elevators of a ship are simply movable fins, working on hinges. When angling upward from the fuselage of a ship, the air hits them, forces the tail down, and the ship climbs. When angling downward the tail is forced up, and the ship dives.

The handkerchief had caught in the crack between one elevator and the horizontal stabilizer of the fuselage, and consequently the ship would stay in the dive as long as the obstruction was there. Both elevators work together. It meant that the ship would dive on downward, faster and faster, and that it would not be leveled out, but would hit the ground at terrific speed, head on.

All these things went through Russ's frenzied mind; without quite realizing what he was doing he loosened his belt. What he was about to attempt was an indication of the stuff he was made of but he did not know that. He had been reviling himself as a weakling, not realizing that the brave man is the one who does something when he is afraid, and not the one who has no fear. Had Russ been yellow he would have given up flying after that first ride.

He did not know it when Ridgeway turned off the motor to slow their speed. Inch by inch he crawled out on the wood and canvas back of the fuselage. A half mile in the air he gripped the narrow turtleback with arms and legs, and inched along it toward the tail as though "shinning" up a pole. He was afraid —horribly afraid—but he did not look down at the miniature world below, and strove to drive from

his mind what a slip would mean. He did not realize the masterly piloting of Ridgeway, who was flying as he had never flown a ship before to keep on an even keel in the dive and counteract every bump. All Russ's faculties were centered on the fluttering bit of white ahead. He must get to it before the upward-rushing ground reached to smash them.

Inch by inch he fought his way along his dizzy perch. When he came within reach of the deadly bit of cloth he dug the fingers of one hand through the canvas, and with closed eyes reached with the other for the handkerchief. He ripped and tore at it while the wires screamed with the speed and the ship commenced to tremble under him in every strut and spar. And he got the obstruction loose.

The next second the ship came level, and the speed decreased. Then the motor came on slowly, and as the ship roared along level Russ inched his way backward. Not until he was in the cockpit again, and had twisted around into his seat and strapped his belt, did he meet the glowing eyes of the smiling, nodding Ridgeway. And at that moment he realized that to be there in the seat, with a ship in good condition and a motor singing along ahead, was not a terrifying experience any more.

Ridgeway sent the ship down in a series of breath-taking dives and wingturns. When he had straightened it out in the procession circling the field for landings, he said his first words that morning through the speaking tube.

"Take 'er and land 'er, youngster!"

Russ took her, and Russ landed her. And Ridgeway proved his confidence in his own judgment by taking his life in his hands and riding toward the ground with his hands in the air, to show Russ that it was strictly up to him. It was a crude dive, a bit too steep, and he leveled out a little too high, but with supreme confidence he nosed over a bit, brought the plane level a foot above the ground, and landed without a bounce on three points.

Scarcely had the ship stopped rolling before Ridgeway had climbed out, and was leaning over the cockpit and looking into Russ's transfigured face.

"Always strike when the iron is hot!" he shouted. "Take her off and see if you can stagger around by yourself. Land close to me—I hate to walk."

The utterly casual words brought Russ down from the heights of exultation with a snap, and he was calmer as he gave the ship the gun and took off. But he was supremely happy—and confident. He skidded a little on his turns, and his dive was a little too slow for safety, but he got down without mishap.

"If I never do it again—I've flown!" he told himself, and the wide grin which had been absent from his face for over a week adorned his freckled countenance once more in all its pristine glory.

Ridgeway walked over to the ship, nodded, climbed in, and directed him to taxi to the line, where Gerard was waiting. Russ turned the ship, and taxied in. His teeth made a white streak across his oil-grimed

face as he looked upward briefly at the ships which swarmed in the sky almost as far as he could see. Down in his heart he knew now that he was a match for the task he had set himself. Some day he would be over there on acrobatics—then a commission—then France, if he was lucky, or an instructor, like Lieutenant Ridgeway——

He saw Perk smiling his slow smile from the bench and clapping his hands in congratulation. He looked about for Gadley, but he was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly he felt sorry for Flags, and half regretted what he had done. It was tough luck to flunk out as a cadet—right then it seemed the toughest luck in the world. It was great to be a flyer——

"Hold on there—slow!" he told himself as he unstrapped his belt. "There are a lot of bridges to cross yet—but darned if I haven't crossed the longest one, and on my hands and knees at that!"

THROUGH THE STORMS

TWO WEEKS LATER

WELL, fellow-kaydet, after divers months of sweating blood, we're on the cross-country stage, and our commissions are just around the corner, so to speak. And gosh! How we dread 'em!"

Big, slouching Perkins, taking long steps to match Russell Farrell's prodigious strides, spoke in his usual deep drawl. His words expressed the general feeling of the little group of cadets who were learning to fly together under the wise eye of Lieutenant Ridgeway. Russ, in particular, felt as though he could at last see daylight ahead.

There had been "a lot of bridges to cross," as he had expressed it two weeks before after his first flying victory, and there would be more. But it seemed as though his greatest difficulties had been surmounted. From that day when he had first soloed his flying had improved steadily, and he was conscious of an abiding confidence in his ability to navigate the air. He had nearly thirty hours of solo flying now, and had passed with flying colors through instruction in cutting "eights" in the air, bringing a ship out of the deadly tailspin, and landing for a

mark. Landing for a mark had been the most difficult art to master, but he had accomplished it more quickly than any of the others except Perkins. Possibly because he had enjoyed the challenge of it so much. Flying a thousand feet high above a white-washed mark on the ground, then cutting the motor down to idling and gliding down in sweeping spirals and attempting to land the ship, without the aid of the motor, so that it would stop rolling inside of a ten-yard circle—it was a feat to make any flying man proud when successfully accomplished. It meant that he must estimate the speed of his glide and his altitude with such exactitude that the ship would lose flying speed when only a couple of feet above a point on the ground from which it would roll to the circle and lose its ground speed when within the mark's exceedingly small circumference.

He had shown Ridgeway, however, that the lanky instructor's judgment of him had been correct by becoming expert enough to hit the mark a majority of times, and now, as Perkins had remarked so contentedly, he, along with the rest of the class, were promoted to the cross-country stage.

Russ pushed his hat farther back on his sandy head, and his freckled face expanded into a smile that seemed to reflect all the exuberance within him.

"You've said it, Perk. By the way, the noise of the motors dieth behind yonder hangars. The warm-up concludeth. Let's go into a gallop in case we're late."

Suiting the action to the word, he broke into a long-legged stride. Perkins followed him, down the mile-long road which split Donovan Field, the biggest airdrome in the world, in two. It was bounded for its entire length by a row of huge white hangars on the south, and an equally long row of equally white barracks and officers' quarters on the north. On the other side of the hangars was the great level expanse of the field, and as Russ had said, the noise of the more than a hundred airplane motors warming up for the day's flying had died into a low drone behind them.

The two cadets turned in at the last hangar, and trotted around it to the bench which faced the flying field. The bench held three other khaki-clad cadets at the moment, and in front of it the ship to which the five men were assigned was standing quietly while the propeller whirled gently at idling speed. The crew chief, a grizzled old sergeant, was in the cockpit, and two other blue-coveralled mechanics were standing at the wings.

"Just in time," panted Russ as they slowed to a walk. "Here comes Lieutenant Ridgeway."

That young officer was sauntering toward the bench, a paper in his hand. His narrow, cool gray eyes surveyed the five expectant cadets as he smiled a greeting. The white scar on his cheek sprang into view when he smiled, and gave his face a one-sided look that increased the whimsical mockery discernible in it at all times.

"All right, you fellows. Cross-country starts to-day. Farrell, you'll take the first trip—to Seguin. Then the rest of you, on successive days, in alphabetic order."

Ridgeway spoke incisively, raising his voice a trifle as the din of the motors all up and down the line increased. Ships were trundling across the field now, and several of them were already in the air.

"You've all been flying a month, now, and have slight chances of staggering through the ozone without necessarily killing yourself. But a flyer that can only fly around the field isn't worth four hoots in hallelujah. This cross-country stage'll send you off away from the field, by yourself, to get to a definite place and back on your own hook, without me to coddle you and tell you what to do. The other two stages—acrobatics and formation—are comparatively simple. Get through here and you ought to be able to put on bars and wings in a couple more weeks, and then get blisters all over your feet as you walk your brand-new boots around the place and grab off salutes.

"No alibis, remember. You either get there and back, or you don't. If you don't, you're discharged. If you do, O. K. Use your own judgment absolutely. Here's your map, Farrell. If you have a forced landing, and you're on your course and make it all right, you can't be blamed. If you're off-course and lost I want no excuses."

Russ, tingling with the knowledge that his greatest test as a flyer was just ahead of him, glanced at the

eastern sky. There was an ominous mass of black mist over there——

"What about storms, sir?" he asked, his blue eyes glued to Ridgeway's face.

"Don't ask advice!" barked Ridgeway. "Use your own head from now on. Depends on how big the storm is, whether you can get around it, a lot of things. That's what this stage is for—see whether you've got a noodle on you or just a knot to keep your backbone from unravelling.

"Another thing. It's customary to let each cadet take a mechanic along, if any mechanic wants to go. They always do—they're crazy about a chance to fly. What nervy mechanical expert of the crew do you desire to invite to risk his neck with you, Farrell?"

Russ hesitated. His eyes rested on the hulking figure of Flags Gadley who was leaning against the ship with something close to a sneer on his face.

Then he said briefly:

"Gadley, sir."

The silence of utter surprise settled over the five cadets. Ridgeway's sloping gray eyes narrowed a bit, and his eyebrows raised the merest trifle. There was a curious tension in the air, as though every one was holding his breath to see what would come next. For every man in the group was convinced that Private Gadley hated Cadet Russ Farrell—and they naturally believed that Russ did not think so much of Gadley.

"I crave to know nothing about your own busi-

ness, youngster," stated Ridgeway finally. "Hop to it."

"Excuse me, sir! May I speak to Farrell, please?"

It was easy-going Perkins, who had the reputation of being a man who would not give a nickel to see the burning of Rome with the original cast. But the big fellow was roused out of his apathy for the moment. He was thirty, and Russ only eighteen, but nevertheless in the hard battles of ground and flying schools a very real friendship had grown up between the two.

"Speak!" ordered Ridgeway. "But not at length. The rest of you boys are due for a pleasant morning on the motor testing blocks."

As had happened many times before during his month with Ridgeway, Russ had the feeling that the mocking instructor hid a deep understanding of his students below his cool, utterly poised exterior. The scar was obvious on Ridgeway's face as he watched Perkins propel Russ to one side.

"Listen here, you freckle-faced, snub-nosed, red-headed Irishman," said Perkins. "I know that Flags Gadley is from your home town, and an old schoolmate, and all that. But I likewise know that he, having been busted as a cadet and jealous of you, has been an enemy of yours ever since you got to Donovan and that he's done his best to make life miserable for you. What's the idea of taking him——"

"I'm sorry for him, Perk," Russ told him. "I can understand how a man must feel that's been a

big athlete back home, and then got busted as a flyer, when he sees a fellow he knows getting a commission. I just thought——"

"Bosh!" grunted Perkins. "Did my eyes deceive me, or did I see you, right on this line, administer to the said Flags a beautiful smack on the jaw when he carried his razzing so far as to call you yellow? And am I blind, or have I seen how he hates you ever since——"

"You can see all right out of your good eye," grinned Russ. "I just thought I'd ask him for old time's sake and maybe he'd——"

"Kiss and make up!" interrupted the disgusted Perkins. "I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw one of these hangars with my left hand!"

"Hustle up!" barked Ridgeway from the line, and Russ turned abruptly toward the big, red-faced Gadley, who had been watching him from his post by the ship. The other cadets were interested spectators, forgetting the ever-fascinating sight of fifty airplanes frolicking in the sky above them.

"'Lo, Flags," Russ greeted him, smiling into the small green eyes before him. "They tell me I can give a mechanic a ride to Seguin this morning, so I thought I'd ask you. How about letting bygones be bygones, and going on a little junket?"

Gadley's loose lips lifted in a sneer, and his perpetually unshaven face was unpleasant as he looked the rangy Farrell up and down. He turned to the sergeant in the cockpit with elaborate dignity.

"Ain't *that* a good one?" he enquired in a loud voice. "Me—ridin' with a guy that come so near bein' busted that it was just luck he got through dual——"

"He busted *you*, all right," the sergeant shot back, and the two other mechanics laughed. The lazy, careless, perpetually grouchy Gadley was not popular with his mates.

The big mechanic's red face got redder, and his eyes gleamed dangerously at the taunt. Never to his dying day would he forget the way Farrell had beaten him with a punch, in view of the whole field.

"No-o-o, you needn't come crawlin' around me offering any rides," he snarled viciously. "Think you're big, now, don't you, handin' out crumbs to the poor!"

Farrell's face went white, and his wide mouth was only a thin line in his face as he strove to hold his temper. There was a dangerous light in his eyes as he stood there for a quiet quarter-minute. Then he relaxed a bit, and turned away.

"Sorry," he said equably, and looked about him for another mechanic.

During that moment there came a curious change in Gadley's face. For the first time he took note of that sullen bank of dark clouds over to the east. The clouds themselves did not matter so much, but the possibilities inherent in them started a train of thought in his mind which was reflected in the sudden ugly glint in his eyes.

Russ turned in surprise at the change in Gadley's voice as the big mechanic said:

"Excuse me, Rusty. I—I'm sorry. I'd like to go, I guess."

"Attaboy. Hop in and get your helmet and goggles!" said Farrell heartily. "I'll be ready to ramble when you are!"

Flags ran toward the hangar, got helmet and goggles from the supply sergeant, and was back again.

As Russ crouched in the cockpit, the throttle all the way forward and his eyes sweeping the instrument board before him, he was thinking of the same thing that was in the back of Gadley's mind—that he was about to meet the hardest test that had yet come his way, and that it was not an exaggeration to say that success or failure hinged on his first trip cross-country. A flyer must not get lost—flyers who can only fly around a field are absolutely useless. And finding one's way in the air is very hard, for there are no labels on towns or railroads or rivers; they all look alike from the sky. And one cannot ask the way, either.

Oil pressure forty, temperature eighty degrees Centigrade, gas-tank full, tachometer needle showing that the motor was doing fourteen hundred revolutions a minute, all eight cylinders roaring along in even rhythm——

He drew the throttle back to idling, nodded to the mechanics to pull the blocks, and settled his goggles over his eyes.

"Excuse me, Rusty—I've made the Seguin trip a dozen times," said Gadley's raucous voice in his ear. "If you'll give me your map in the back seat, I can help you keep on the course."

For a moment Russ was tempted. Then he shook his head.

"Thanks, Flags, but I want to make it on my own," he shouted above the low clatter of the camshaft and valves.

As soon as he had made sure that the mechanic had his belt strapped, the sergeant took the left wing and helped the pilot bring the ship around for the takeoff. The next second Russ fed it the throttle, and pressed forward on the stick until the tailskid left the ground and the plane was hurtling across the smooth ground on its two wheels.

He eased back on the stick, and suddenly the riding grew smoother as the ship took the air. He circled around the field three times, to get a safe two thousand feet of altitude. Then, watching his map closely, he swung east, skirted the southern edge of San Antonio, and counted the railroads. When he came to the third one leading east from the city he followed it. Seguin should be the tenth town along that flashing double-line of steel, if he was on the right railroad. When he came to a crossing, at the spot indicated on the map, he knew he was right. Now he must count the towns along the road, to make certain where he was at all times. He put his head over the side to squint ahead, and the pro-

peller wash hit him like a blow from an unseen hand. There were no towns immediately ahead, so he gave himself up to the joy of handling his ship as it roared along above smiling fields and gleaming railroads, interspersed with patches of gray-green mesquite like blots on a painted canvas.

He buried himself in his work as town after town crawled by, and he checked them off on his map.

It behooved him to watch closely, for it was not easy to distinguish between hamlets unnoted on the map and the real villages.

He was concentrating so thoroughly on his task that the sudden disappearance of the sun was a shock. He looked ahead, and found that the ship was driving straight into a wall of murky mist. Beneath the low-hanging mass of gray clouds there were slanting streaks of rain.

He hesitated in making his decision. There was no Ridgeway to tell him what to do and if he did the wrong thing no alibis would be acceptable back at Donovan Field. If he turned back, and other men went through and made the trip successfully, he would be discredited. On the other hand, if the storm was a big one, and he was driven off-course or cracked up, no excuse would be sufficient.

He turned around and looked at Flags Gadley. Flags had been at Donovan Field for months, and had made the trip many times——

Gadley nodded reassuringly and pointed straight ahead. Gadley knew the quick, momentarily severe

thunderstorms of Texas, and despite himself, he had been compelled to admit that Rusty Farrell was a born flyer and could already handle a ship in good shape. They should weather the shower without disaster.

Russ, his heart pounding heavily, guided the ship straight into the storm. In a few seconds the raindrops were stinging his face like jabs from so many hot needles. He could not see fifty feet ahead of him, and the ground was only a vague dark mass far below.

Then the mist seemed to thicken, and the ground was blotted out. It was pure imagination, but to the cadet it seemed as though the roar of the motor had increased until it made his head reel. Tremendous air-currents, whirling toward the vortex of the tempest, caught the ship and made it careen dizzily. Russ fought the stick grimly, his head bent to save his tortured face as much as possible.

Jagged streaks of lightning split the seething mist, and the crack of the thunder momentarily drowned the bellow of the motor. The ground was out of sight, so it was almost impossible to keep the ship level. Twice it stalled, and the motor quit, but Russ, dazed with the relentless battering of the elements, nevertheless instinctively flew his ship and never let it get entirely away from him. The plane was a frail plaything being tossed about among the giants of the storm, and all he could do was fight the best he knew.

Caught in a rising current, the ship would bound upward, and a moment later drop like a stone. The terrific winds twisted and strained it cruelly, and the motor was laboring heavily. The universe seemed made of nothing but dense black fog and torturing rain.

Flags was truly amazed at the extent of the storm. He would never have advised Russ to try it had he dreamed that it would prove such a terrific outburst of the elements. He hunched down in the back seat, thoroughly frightened, and waited tensely while his pilot fought ahead.

They were five minutes battling their way through, but to Russ it seemed like so many aeons. He felt absolutely helpless, as though pitting his puny strength and skill against something so tremendous that resistance was futile. Transcending all the physical pain and numbing fear, however, was the dull consciousness that perhaps, even if he did get through safely, he would fail in achieving the object of his trip. The compass was swinging wildly, affected by the electricity in the storm, and he had no idea where he was. The altimeter varied crazily—now a thousand feet, now only five hundred, sometimes as high as two thousand as the ship fluttered like a leaf, the plaything of an aerial whirlpool.

He felt, somehow, as though all this would never end, that he was doomed to fight on and on, hopelessly. He could scarcely believe his eyes as it seemed that the mist was lightening ahead. He

wiped off his fogged goggles again—that process was a continuous necessity. The clouds were less dense, and it seemed that the rain was less severe. He banked a trifle to make for what seemed the lightest spot, and at that second, as though delivering a parting blow, a powerful gust of wind caught the upflung left wing and nearly sent the ship on its back. For a few seconds he worked with rudder and stick to bring the ship level again. Then the sturdy plane hurtled forth into smiling sunlight which called blinding rays of light from the drenched earth.

The young pilot felt suddenly weak as the relief of it surged over him. Then he gathered himself together, and swept the ground with his eyes. The railroad was nowhere in sight, unless the storm behind them was temporarily hiding it.

Gadley leaned over and tapped Russ on the shoulder. Farrell turned, and Flags pointed southward.

Russ was thoroughly lost and glad of guidance. He nodded and swung around to the right, without question.

In a few moments they were over territory which had not felt the full force of the storm, for the ground was only slightly wet. Russ scrutinized the ground closely, for he had already formed the habit of locating a possible landing field at all times. At the moment there was little to worry about in a forced landing, for below the ship was a stubble field,

about two hundred and fifty yards long and half as wide. It was bounded on all four sides by fences, he noticed, and surrounded by cotton fields. It was deserted country—the nearest house was a quarter of a mile away.

Despite himself, Russ was becoming worried and distraught as he searched the ground for the railroad. Surely it should be in sight by now——

And then he became literally paralyzed, for the moment. The motor ahead of him sputtered a moment, and died. Automatically he nosed down to keep flying speed, and then worked the throttle desperately to see if the trouble was there. He looked at his instruments swiftly, but they told him nothing because the cessation of the motor made them valueless.

He felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to meet Gadley's small eyes gleaming behind his goggles. Flags pointed down at the field Russ himself had already picked. Russ nodded, cut the spark to obviate the danger of fire, and started to spiral fifteen hundred feet to the ground.

The tricky business of making an accurate forced landing with a dead motor was almost forgotten by him as this last stroke of fate occupied his mind. Off-course, and compelled to land and get help besides. If he could manage a safe landing and was not too far away from the railroad he might survive the failure, but it was a slim chance.

Even this early in his flying career Russ had shown

that "feel" of the ship and judgment of speed and distance that mark the natural flyer, and so he dropped his ship over the fence with only five feet to spare and barely ten miles an hour extra flying speed. He cut the throttle as the ship floated along above the ground. He didn't want the motor to cut in right then, for the field was none too large and the ship would roll a long way at best.

There came that instant of hovering which marks the dropping of the speed rate below that necessary to keep the ship in the air. Russ pulled back on the stick to get the tail down.

The fence was less than a hundred yards ahead when the ship hit the ground at fifty miles an hour.

Russ, taut as a bowstring as he tried to make his landing perfect on the wet ground, was utterly astounded when suddenly the motor caught. He had turned off the switch, and the motor had gone dead in the air. As he heard the roar of the motor his hand automatically dropped to the throttle, and he felt it come back. As he looked at the switch he saw that, too, come back, and the motor died.

The ship was speeding for the fence. It was less than twenty yards in front of him when he jammed his right foot against the rudder and pushed the stick to the left. A "ground loop" was the only possible maneuver under the circumstances.

The ship turned abruptly to the right. The tail-skid ripped into the ground, and one tire burst with a loud report. The right wing dipped until the

wing skid, an oval brace on the bottom of the wing to protect the frail wing on a quick ground turn, was shattered. The second it broke the wing dropped even more, and the aileron linen was badly ripped, but he had escaped the complete crack-up which would have resulted had he run into the fence.

The ship had hardly stopped rolling when Russ jumped out. In those crowded seconds while he was handling his ship his mind had leaped to the only conclusion possible, in view of what had happened. Flags had turned on the switch and the throttle, in an endeavor to run the ship into the fence. The motor had worked perfectly; so Flags was responsible for its failure in the air. Had turned off the gas, probably. Flags had directed him southward after the storm—southward, and still farther off his course. It was all part and parcel of a plot to ruin him—and Flags' triumphant smile and glowing eyes corroborated the explanation. It was a good plan—except through the accident of having caught that throttle movement he could never have guessed, much less proved, what had happened.

Farrell's face was bloodless, and he was quivering with the overwhelming wrath that filled him. Gadley's face changed as he looked at the rangy cadet with the blue-steel eyes that were blazing into his own. Without saying a word, Russ leaped forward, and his open hand caught Flags on the cheek as he crouched in the back cockpit.

As has been mentioned, Flags was no coward.

He had played a mighty good game of football at Bluefield High School, and he was not devoid of nerve. Momentarily conscience-stricken, he had been afraid, but as he took that terrific slap he vaulted to the ground, and whirled to meet Farrell's rush.

Rusty's rage made him incautious; he swung wildly, missed. It was Gadley's big opportunity; a vicious right-handed blow sent Russ staggering back against the damaged ship. Then it was Gadley's turn to be careless. His face contorted with hatred, he rushed at Farrell to complete his triumph.

Russ gathered himself. He threw his every ounce of weight and muscle into a terrific right that started at his wrist, landed flush on the mechanic's jaw, and crumpled him to earth like a stricken tree. Nor did he rise.

Russ waited for a moment, looking down at the motionless body of his antagonist. Then his arms dropped wearily, and he was aware of the fact that he was very tired—and utterly miserable. He did not even see the man who was standing on the other side of the ship, a hoe in his hand.

"Had tuh land tuh give 'im a beatin', eh?" said the newcomer, and Russ turned in utter surprise.

"I was workin' over here a piece and seen yuh land," the man went on, leaning his gaunt body against the ship. "Didn't reckon I'd git all this fur my trouble, though. You polished 'im off proper, boy."

"Where's the San Antone-Seguin railroad from here?" demanded Russ abruptly.

"Fifteen miles north," drawled the Texan, apparently not surprised that Russ did not care to talk about the recent battle.

"If I flew due north to the railroad, and then flew east, what's the first town I'd strike?"

"Carnes City. Lost?"

"I was, but I'm not now!" said Russ, and managed a grin. "Pardon me—we've got to get to Seguin."

He looked at the damaged aileron briefly. There was a big hole in it, which would make flying difficult, if not impossible. He did not hesitate in making his decision, though. It never occurred to him that he should not try to go on.

Watched by the interested Texan, he got in the ship and taxied it a little further around. It was so near the fence that a takeoff in the opposite direction was a possibility from where the ship was standing.

Flags came to, and got to his feet a bit dizzily. Russ beckoned to him, and he walked over to the ship.

"Get in!" snapped Farrell.

"L—Listen, that aileron——"

"Get in, or stay here. I'm going."

Gadley hesitated, and then got in without a word. He was thoroughly cowed, and slumped in the back seat, holding a handkerchief to his still bleeding nose.

Russ was just about to turn on the throttle when he thought of that one useless tire. It would be

almost an impossibility to take off or land with one flat tire. He was at a loss for a moment, and then climbed out and let the air out of the other one. Two flat tires would not be so bad. He got in again, buckled his belt, and gave the ship the gun.

It took the air a few feet from the boundary fence, and that instant nearly marked the end of Russ Farrell's career. The one damaged aileron made the ship dip on that side until he got the stick over to the left. The ailerons are movable fins on each wing, which make the wings go up or down as the stick is moved. Part of the linen being gone from the right one caused it to have less lifting surface, and consequently unable to bear its share of the weight.

The ship barely escaped the fence—a few inches less altitude would have meant a very bad wreck. With the stick halfway over to the left, however, Russ succeeded in keeping the plane level. It was a wearisome task to hold the stick there, and if the airstream should tear more linen off it would be impossible to control the craft at all. Nevertheless, he drove along grimly. He'd get to Seguin, or wreck in the attempt.

The trip was a long-drawn-out nightmare. There were breathless seconds when the wing-heavy ship wobbled dangerously; once a puff of wind nearly caused it to go out of control. It labored through the air, and the strain of waiting for the moment when the linen might start to tear was never eased for a second.

But the physical peril of the trip was not the only thing that contributed to Farrell's utter misery, for he was fighting a battle in his own mind that gave him no peace. On the one hand, he could save himself from being discharged. He knew that. When Flags had held that throttle forward for a moment, he had given himself away and supplied the proof that would have been lacking, otherwise, even if Russ had been suspicious of the peculiar events leading up to the wreck. But the cost of saving himself—the penalty that the slouching mechanic would inevitably have to pay—was something from which he shrank.

Meanwhile Flags, in the back seat, saw years in Federal prison looming before him. He cursed the over-eagerness to ruin Farrell that had led him into baring his scheme so plainly. He could have accomplished his purpose, probably without holding that throttle forward to make matters sure.

As the ship staggered down on the field at Seguin a chubby little officer was beside Russ as the cadet got out wearily. Flags stayed in the rear cockpit, his eyes like those of some hunted beast. The flyer glanced at the ship briefly.

"You took two hours for a one-hour trip, and you've got a ripped aileron and two flat tires," he said. "What happened?"

Russ drew a long breath, and his shadowed eyes caused the officer to gaze at him with pity in the depths of his own.

"I got lost in a storm, and overshot the field when I landed to find out where I was," Russ said slowly.

"Hum. Three mistakes. Going into the storm that was too big to go through. Not keeping your direction in it—didn't know electricity in a storm ruins your compass temporarily, eh? Third, messing up your landing. If you can't land with a good motor, what'd you do with a dead one? Punk work, Farrell! Sergeant! Get a new aileron and new wheels on here."

Gadley's face was a study. He looked like a man in a dream as he listened to the short conversation. When Russ turned away, his eyes on the ground, the mechanic stayed rooted to the spot.

Russ walked a short distance, and then flopped on the ground. His air-castles were shattered now.

"Rusty, what'd you lie for?"

It was Gadley, twisting his hat in his hands, his flushed face beaded slightly with sweat as his eyes wavered before Farrell's.

"You'd be in jail for the rest of your life—attempted murder, maybe, and deliberately conspiring against the army and the government in time of war," Russ told him. "If I didn't know your folks so well maybe I wouldn't have said what I did for a worm like you, but——"

His voice trailed off, and Flags turned to escape the blaze of utter fury which suddenly leaped into the blue eyes looking up at him from the ground.

An hour later, back at Donovan Field, Ridgeway was awaiting them as they taxied to the line.

"You were reported by radio an hour late at Seguin," he said cooly. "What's the matter?"

Russ tried to carry it off jauntily, but he was aware that he was making a poor job of it.

"Made a mess of the trip, sir," he said with a crooked smile. "Got lost in a storm, landed to find out where I was and ripped my aileron——"

"No, sir! It wasn't any such thing, Lieutenant!" It was Gadley's rasping voice, and it quivered with nervous excitement as he poured out the true story of the morning in a wild rush of words. His big body was trembling, and he constantly licked his lips as he went on. Ridgeway, tall and slim and utterly unsurprised, apparently, listened tranquilly.

"Rusty didn't tell 'em at Seguin on account of him and me being from Bluefield, and him knowing my folks. But I'm giving you the straight of it, sir!" Flags concluded.

His body seemed to slump as he finished, and his eyes did not raise to meet Ridgeway's gaze.

Russ came to himself with a snap. He had been so dumbfounded to hear Flags' words that he had been literally speechless.

"He can't be courtmartialed if I don't testify, can he, sir?" he asked quickly.

Ridgeway hummed a little tune for a moment as his steel-gray eyes rested on the two men before him. Then he said:

"It was about as stinking a thing as I've heard of recently, Gadley. The next wrong move you make, in

the jug you go, if I have to courtmartial Farrell here to make him testify. If he doesn't make a complaint meanwhile, I guess you're safe. As long as I make no complaint, he's safe. I hate to give a thug like you another chance, but for Farrell's sake I'll keep my mouth shut. Farrell, you're a fool, I think, but sometimes it's a relief to go off one's nut for a minute."

That queer look of understanding beneath the cool sheen of those narrow eyes suddenly became something warm and personal, and then the instructor made off, humming a lilting Negro tune that was a favorite of his:

"Some o' these nights 'bout twelve o'clock,
This ol' worl' gonna reel and rock!
Pharaoh's army got drownded,
O-o-oh, Mary, don't you weep!"

Swift happiness, scarcely believable, swept over Russ. Like magic the vista ahead of him changed from the bleakness of utter failure to the surpassing brightness of the vision of himself as a flying officer, one of the chosen few who would be entrusted with the best and fastest ships in the world some day. . . .

Through the haze of happiness he thought he saw Flags' hand move at his side. He impulsively thrust forth his own, and the two men shook.

"Let's forget it all, eh?" grinned Russ. There was no room in his heart for a grudge then.

Flags tried to speak, gulped, and finally compromised on nodding.

SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE

CELEBRATION of the Fourth of July was proceeding joyously in Dalman, Texas. For a town of less than fifteen thousand people it was doing itself proud. The fair grounds were packed with a seething mass of people, among whom were several hundred men in uniform, and the Johnson Greater Shows carnival was doing a thriving business. The Midway was jammed with people who did not seem to mind the blazing heat. The cries of the barkers resounded above the murmur of the crowd, and the calliope of the merry-go-round vied with the five-piece band which was advertising the freak show.

Suddenly in a temporary cessation of noise the drone of a motor became audible. With one accord everyone stopped whatever he was doing to look up into the flawless sky. Limned against it was an airplane.

It was directly above the fair grounds, and a little more than a half mile high. As the people watched it, it suddenly fell toward the ground, nose-first. The next second it was spinning dizzily, growing in size at an enormous rate. It screwed downward, nose-first, whirling so rapidly that it did not seem as though any human being could keep his head clear

within it. As it came down to a thousand feet, women grew pale, and clutched the arms of the men with them. The speed with which the big plane was dropping earthward became more awe-inspiring as it came closer. Men muttered uneasily.

Then, a few hundred feet above the ground, the motor went on with a deafening roar. The spinning stopped, and the plane flashed downward in a straight nose-dive. It swooped out of the dive, came level, and circled the oblong racetrack. Then the motor died gradually, and the plane glided toward the ground. It disappeared from sight behind the gaudily decorated tents of the carnival.

The crowd surged down the Midway to find the shortest way of reaching the racetrack. Before even the vanguard of curious observers had reached the track, however, Lieutenant Russ Farrell, of the United States Army Air Service, was on the ground beside his plane, talking with grizzled old Sergeant Mory, his mechanic.

Russ had not been a lieutenant long. In fact, he had been wearing his bars and boots only a few weeks. June twentieth had been the date, to be exact, although his progress had been smooth and swift from the day when he had completed his first cross-country trip despite the efforts of a Texas thunderstorm and Flags Gadley.

There had been only two more stages to pass through—acrobatics and formation. The acrobatics he took to like a duck to water. It seemed as though

he had a natural aptitude for looping-the-loop, tail-spinning, and other maneuvers which necessitate throwing a ship on its back and twisting it around generally. Formation was a little harder—it is far from easy for even the most expert flyer to fly a ship in a V formation of other ships, and keep it constantly in position a few yards back, a few yards to one side, and a few yards higher than the ship ahead. An airplane has no brakes, and it is flying at practically full throttle all the time.

But he had satisfied Ridgeway, finally, and there had come a day when, along with Perkins and the rest of the class, he had walked into headquarters, arrayed for the last time in leggings and a campaign hat with a white hat-band around it. He had raised his right hand and sworn to do his duty as a commissioned officer of the United States Army, and received his commission, signed by the President of the United States. It had been a moment which had brought a lump into Farrell's throat, somehow. He forgot that it was the end of his long struggle to become a flyer, and could only remember the honor and responsibility which had been given to him.

It had been a rather solemn little group which had gone back to the barracks, taken off their cadet clothes, and put on the insignia of flying officers.

Russ had been assigned immediately to the instuctors' field, where new airmen were taught how to instruct the constant stream of raw cadets which were pouring into Donovan Field from the ground

schools, just as Russ had come a few months before. Having a natural aptitude for stunt flying, however, Russ had been assigned to give an aerial exhibition at Dalman, when a ship had been requested by the town authorities, before really finishing his post-graduate course. Which, in itself, was a tribute to the kind of flyer the rangy young New Englander had become.

"That was just an advance specimen of the death-defying exhibition of aerial deviltry I am supposed to give this afternoon, Sarge," the young pilot was saying with a grin. "I guess it gave 'em a kick, at that."

Stocky, broad-shouldered Sergeant Mory's scarred face wrinkled into a grin that extended from ear to ear.

"It gave my belly a kick that come near pullin' it right out o' me," he stated. "Looks like the Fourth is quite a day in Dalman, don't it? Here they come. Git ready to sell your life dearly, Lieutenant. We'll have to fight 'em off in a minute."

A thin-faced, dark man, in the uniform of a second lieutenant in the reserve corps, was first on the ground by over a hundred yards.

"Glad to see you, Lieutenant," he greeted the broad-shouldered, red-headed airman. "It sure seems good to see one of these ships again. I was a private in the Air Service myself during the war—transferred to get a try at a commission. My name is Barrett—I presume you're Farrell?"

As Russ shook hands with the Dalman man he noticed that Barrett's eyes seemed sunken, and that his thin face had bitter lines in it. Yet Russ was aware of an immediate liking for him.

"Stand back, folks, please!" yelled Mory in stentorian tones as a motley crowd surged around the ship. "Fifteen feet! Here, buddy, help me out, will you?"

The uniformed man Mory appealed to leaped into action, and others followed suit. In a moment the ever-growing crowd was surrounding the ship in a big circle. There were men in boots and overalls, others in the uniform of the Dalman band, others in army khaki, and the great majority in ordinary civilian attire, minus coats. Women and children were plentiful and a little knot of Mexicans and negroes were in a group of their own.

"Let me through! Stand back there, everybody! Make way!"

A fat young man, his red face perspiring, bellowed these commands. As he fought his way through the crowd, shouting orders incessantly, Russ saw that he was likewise a second lieutenant in the reserve corps. No sooner had the stranger got to the middle of the circle than he started ordering some of the privates about. He strutted around the ship, placing men here and there to hold off the crowd, interrupting his pompous shouts with stern commands to individuals in the crowd. "Get back or I'll put you off the grounds!" came from his lips with frequency. Russ strove to hold back a grin as he watched the

man. "Who is yonder general in the gold bars?" he enquired of Barrett.

"None other than Charley Hopkins, son of the man that runs Dalman and darn near owns it," responded Barrett. His thin lips were twisted in a half-bitter smile.

Mory's wide tanned face and puckered eyes held an expression of carefully respectful amusement as he looked on. He turned to say something to Barrett as Hopkins came toward them, mopping his red brow with a handkerchief. Russ composed his face as the heavy young fellow greeted him.

"My name is Hopkins, Farrell," announced the perspiring Dalman man. "My father, Colonel Hopkins, got you here and is in charge of the entire celebration. I am ranking reserve officer here. You go look around and enjoy yourself before my father makes the speech of the day. I'll see that your plane is guarded for you. You will do the flying this afternoon—I'll give you your exact orders later."

Russ snorted into a laugh which he choked with a cough. Evidently Hopkins planned to continue in the spotlight.

"Didn't I order everybody to stand back? Get out of here, Barrett, and get out quick!"

Russ whirled around as Hopkins plunged past him toward where Barrett was talking with Mory.

"Move! We don't want anybody near this plane—least of all a Spig!"

The word "Spig," border slang for the lowest type of Mexican peon, fell from Hopkins' lips like a hot coal. Sudden silence gripped the crowd.

With lightning quickness Barrett straightened and hit Hopkins full on his fat-padded jaw. The big fellow did not go down, but staggered a bit. As he regained his balance and lunged forward Russ grabbed him from behind, and twisted with all his strength. Hopkins struggled ferociously, and tore himself loose. As he turned, he swung wildly at the flyer. Farrell dodged easily, and the next second Hopkins hit the ground. Mory had thrust a foot between the Dalman man's legs.

"Get back, Barrett!" commanded Farrell crisply. He was dumbfounded at the turn things had taken, and at a total loss for the explanation. He did know, however, that there was a terrible glare in the black sunken eyes of Barrett, and that there was menace even in the dead silence of the crowd.

Barrett hesitated, and then, as Hopkins struggled to his feet, he dropped back a few steps.

"So you'd assault an officer, would you?" gritted Hopkins to Mory. "You'll spend the rest of your life——"

"Wherever he wants to!" blazed Farrell. "I'm an officer, too, Hopkins—a regular—and I ordered Mory to help me out handling you!"

Sergeant Mory grinned with whole-souled joy. A snicker came from the crowd.

"What's biting you, anyway?" demanded Farrell

wrathfully. "Of all the idiots that ever were out of place in a uniform——"

"Here, here, what's all this? Charley! What in——"

An older edition of Charles Hopkins, garnished with a black walrus moustache, big black sombrero, and flowing black tie, had puffed into the situation. Young Hopkins pointed to Barrett, and through contorted lips gasped:

"Frank Barrett hit me, and then these two lit in. I'll kill him, as sure as——"

"Shut up!" ordered Colonel Hopkins rudely. "I'll handle this. I'll teach you, Barrett, a lesson that you don't seem to've learnt yet. Hank! Where's Hank Kiefer?"

A short, bowlegged man in a huge sombrero, flannel shirt decorated with a marshal's badge, and overalls tucked into boots, came forward slowly. He was gnawing a scraggly moustache.

"Arrest Frank Barrett fur assault, Hank. We'll see whether any bum that wants tuh can run this roost!"

The crowd, astounded and apparently half-afraid as well, was so quiet that Kiefer's low-voiced: "Yes, sir, Colonel," could be plainly heard. The marshal was turning to Barrett when Farrell grasped his arm.

"Arrest him nothing!" he shouted, his freckles standing out vividly against his suddenly white skin.

Kiefer looked nonplussed, and for a second there was absolute quiet.

"Barrett did nothing except avenge an insult!"

flamed Farrell. "And by the great horn spoon, if he's arrested unjustly you'll get no flying exhibition out of me, and I'll see to it, if my testimony's any good, that he goes free and that this bird here who butted in on my business gets it in the neck! Who gave him or anybody else authority to order Barrett away from this ship?"

Russ was standing so close to the elder Hopkins that they were touching. Helmet and goggles in his hand, the flyer was snarling his words into the convulsed face of Dalman's leading citizen.

"You've been talking out o' your turn, as usual, Hopkins," drawled a big man close by, and his softly intoned words carried with curious clearness. "I ain't here on duty, but I can be. This boy's right. Pull in your neck, and save your voice for your speech!"

Hopkins seemed struggling for speech. He was patently at a loss. Farrell got hold of himself, and found time to wonder about the inner angles to the situation. The tall, sunburnt, gray-haired man who had just spoken carried a gun—and his words seemed to have miraculous power. Hitherto the Hopkins family had dominated the situation, and the respect —almost awe—in which they were held by the crowd was most apparent. Now the soft-voiced stranger took easy command.

What the apoplectic Colonel Hopkins might have wanted to say was never said, for a bugle suddenly sounded the notes of "assembly."

It seemed that the clear notes broke the tension, and that men began to breathe again. Colonel Hopkins saved the remnants of his dignity by shouting, with suddenly assumed geniality:

"All right, boys! Git over there!"

His son's bellows started once more, and the crowd melted away. The uniformed men bustled over behind some large exhibition buildings at the side of the track opposite the carnival Midway, and the rest of the crowd made for points of vantage from which to view the parade. Colonel Hopkins stepped up to Russ, his fleshy face purple with wrath.

"You're responsible for this, you whipper snapper, and I'll see to it that the army doesn't hold *you* for long!"

The hot words which sprang to Farrell's lips were checked as he remembered the other's age. He turned away silently.

"Don't mind the old windbag," came the voice of the efficient stranger. "I'll stick around here and guard your plane, son. Go see the parade. Frank, you'd better hustle."

Barrett nodded silently, and started for the rendezvous. Russ fell in step with him, Mory remaining by the ship.

"What's the reason for all that happened, Barrett?" demanded Russ.

"Since my grandfather's day there's been a feud between our two families," Barrett told him. "Started on a business deal. Finally Hopkins won

with some scurvy tricks—I'm out on a farm now, so poor I can't even afford to bring my wife and son in to town to-day. Young Charley Hopkins and I have fought since school days. You can see what type he is—his father's made him so, maybe."

Russ hesitated and then asked:

"He—said something to you that made you hit him——"

"My grandfather married a Castilian noblewoman," Barrett answered proudly. Then his dark thin face changed into something sinister. "The next time they say 'Spig' to me I'll kill the one that says it!"

"If I'm around, I'll help," grinned Russ, in an effort to relieve Barrett's sudden ferocity. "Hopkins, as I understand it, is the head of this fair and of everything else in town, eh?"

Barrett nodded.

"Everybody's afraid of him. He holds mortgages, employs about half the town, and all that. They say he isn't so well off for ready cash right now, at that—I understand Charley's lost him a lot of money, and cotton has been a failure for the last four years. His bank's in a pretty tight way, so they say—but he's got plenty, one way or another."

"The only good thing I've heard about him is this fair here—the proceeds go to a fund for the use of disabled veterans, don't they?"

"Uh, huh. I'm wondering what there is in it for Hopkins, at that. But then I guess I'm prejudiced. Well, *adios*. See you after the parade."

The line of march was up town and then back to the grounds. After a picnic lunch Hopkins' speech was scheduled, then Farrell's flying exhibition as a special attraction. Russ hurried back to the ship, where Mory greeted him with:

"Lieutenant Farrell, meet Mr. Sibley, of the Texas Rangers."

As Russ shook hands with the weatherbeaten Ranger he realized why Sibley had dominated the situation so easily. It had taken decades of epic achievement to build the name "Ranger"—and the name alone was more effective than most guns.

"We been talkin' about this here carnival—the Johnson Greater Shows," the sergeant proceeded. "In my young days I was a carnival and circus roustabout myself, Lieutenant. This here looks like a turkey outfit to me and that usually means it's crooked. I wonder how they're workin' this thing financially with the outfit. Seems to me——"

"Fifty-fifty on the net profits between the carnival and the committee," stated Sibley. "Somebody says that to me, anyhow. They been runnin' two days already—the carnival. This here's the last big windup."

The blare of the band suddenly split the air. Long lines of khaki-clad men, marching, poured out on the track, and swung around it toward the entrance to the street. The crowd was packing the rails, and more people were pouring through the gate. Out on the street, others were lining the sidewalks.

As always, the sound of a band playing a swinging martial strain thrilled Farrell, and the sight of the war veterans marching deepened his feeling. Now that his first wild enthusiasm over the thrill of conquering the air had settled into a deeper, more contained satisfaction, he was ever more conscious of the meaning of his uniform, and of a greater pride in the country which had given him birth. The flag fluttering in front of those veterans, the men themselves, the day —all were part of the surging pride which filled him. Somehow the events of the morning—that taunt thrown in Barrett's teeth—made him realize the deeper meaning of the day, and of all that patriotism and America meant. It was more than wild shouting over the flag, or loud cheers when the band and the troops passed by. Democracy, equality, a square deal——

He was thinking these things while they waited for the parade to traverse the main street of Dalman and reënter the fairgrounds, carrying with it a veritable flood of newcomers. Then, when the troops had fallen out and lunch baskets came into view all around, he accepted Mory's suggestion that they make a tour down the crowded Midway.

The spielers were barking their loudest, and every booth was doing a tremendous business.

"They're on the loose, Lieutenant," Mory stated. "Look there at the merchandise wheel. They're playing for money, see? Put your money on the number, spin the wheel, collect—or not. That's

against the law. They must have a stand-in with the local authorities to get away with it. I'll bet the wheel's crooked, too.

"Look there, at that bucket game. See the barker throw a ball, hit the bottom, and the ball go through the hole in the side of it all right? Now watch. There's a customer. See him miss—for a dime? The reason for that is that the ball the carnival man uses is specially made so it won't bounce much. The ball he gives a customer is specially made to bounce a lot—the poor sucker couldn't get one of the balls he's using through that hole to save his life."

"You say the carnival must have a stand-in with the authorities to get away with gambling for money —even for charity?" demanded Russ.

"Sure," grinned Mory. "That's a favorite of crooked carnivals. Split the profits with 'em."

"The authorities mean Hopkins, as near as I can find out," said Russ thoughtfully. "You think that wheel is crooked?"

"Prob'ly. Shouldn't be surprised if you would find a brake worked by the feller's foot so's he can stop the wheel on the number where there ain't no money. Kind o' cheap stuff on the Fourth of July, ain't it? Takin' folks' money like that because it's partly fur the soldiers—and believe me, from what I know of outfits like this, the soldiers ain't gettin' their share, either. I'd like to know how the shares check up the last two days——"

"I'm going to get a look at that wheel," stated Russ.

Always impulsive, the big flyer jostled his way to one of the gambling wheels, and watched it spin twice. Then, without warning, he put his hand on the counter where the numbers were painted, and vaulted over it. Before the astonished carnival man could interfere, he ducked down below it in time to catch the man's foot on the pedal of a concealed braking arrangement.

"Here, what you think you're doin'?" roared the astounded employee. "Git——"

"Where's your boss—the big gun of the outfit?" demanded Farrell.

He vaulted back over the counter, and the silent crowd made way for him.

"Office on the rear end o' the train. A lot o' good that'll do yuh—whatever yuh got up your sleeve," sneered the carnival man. "All right, folks—step right up and win——"

Farrell was plunging through the crowd with Mory. The patrons who had seen the incident were muttering among themselves, wondering, suspecting the truth. In a few strides the two army men had left them behind, and were making for the gaudily painted cars which housed the Johnson Greater Shows while en route. They were standing on a railroad siding.

"I figured so," nodded the grinning Mory. "Cashin' in on the flag and the soldiers and the Fourth of July. If there were fewer folks whose patriotism stopped with frothin' at the mouth, there'd be a

considerable better country for you and me to work for, Lieutenant. They're great until it commences to hit their pocketbook."

"Stuff like that means a good stand-in with the powers that be, as you say. That means Hopkins, I believe, as I said. I'm going to find out definitely."

"If he's the kind of an hombre that'll stand for a thing like that, he's prob'ly the kind that wouldn't be above turnin' an extra nickel or two himself," Mory reminded his chief.

"Where to, boys?"

The drawl was unmistakable, and Russ turned to confront Ranger Sibley. In a few words he told him their mission.

"I saw somethin' was up. Some o' the crowd's wondering what your high-jumping act was over there—and if they find out what you did, they might get ugly. Mind if I sit in? I might help——"

"Tickled to death, sir," Russ told him.

A little farther on they came across Barrett, and added him to the party.

They climbed to the platform of the last car, and entered the first compartment unceremoniously. A short, barrel-bodied, bullet-headed man was sitting at a tiny littered desk. The car had an indescribably offensive odor—compound of dirt and tobacco smoke and body-odor, the unmistakable smell of poorly ventilated railroad coaches.

"Are you the owner of this outfit?" demanded Russ.

"Who wants to know?" countered the other in a rasping voice. "Well, yes. What can I do for you?"

"Tell us why you're runnin' crooked merchandise wheels for money, usin' an army of shills, leavin' your mob on the loose, and rookin' the crowd right and left," stated Mory, and his technical description caused the other's frog eyes to open slowly.

"What business is it o' yours?" demanded the carnival man finally.

"You'll see in a minute," rejoined Russ grimly. "What were the amounts on the first two days' proceeds to be turned over to the fund?"

The carnival man squirmed uneasily. His heavy eyes blinked rapidly.

"Ain't been figured yet——"

"You're a liar," stated Mory flatly. "You have a check-up every night, and you know your expenses. Come clean!"

"I'm Sibley of the Rangers. Speak up, suh!"

The Ranger's puckered gray eyes held the other's muddy green ones for a moment. Then came the reluctant words:

"Around a hundred each day. Now get out of here——"

"When we're good and ready!" snapped Russ. "How've crowds been, Barrett?" he demanded.

"From all I hear, tremendous," was the prompt answer. "People figure half of everything they spend goes to the veterans' fund——"

"And with crooked money wheels workin' and the worst bunch of con games and strong joints I ever saw—a measly hundred bucks!" snorted Mory.

The carnival man leaped to his feet, and shook a ham-like fist.

"Do your talkin' to Hopkins!" he shouted. "Get out o' my office——"

"Here he is, now," came Sibley's voice, and he entered with both Hopkins and his son. "Saw him passin' by, warmin' up fur a nice speech all about our brave boys."

Russ whirled on the Dalman magnate.

"Colonel Hopkins, you're running this affair. This carnival is stealing money by every crooked device known to the business. Somebody's protecting them—and somebody's getting money which ought to go for the purpose the people are spending it. It'd be bad enough to take care of veterans on crooked money—but when even they are double-crossed, we want an explanation—then we can enjoy your speech better. This man here said to do our talking to you."

"Reckon you'd better talk, Hopkins," drawled Sibley.

Outside there seemed to be a change in the timbre of the crowd's noise. Barrett slipped to the door and went out. Charley Hopkins looked astounded, and his face was reddening slowly. His father cleared his throat, while his flesh-rimmed eyes darted here and there, as though seeking some way out of the

dilemma. Johnson, though his hard face wore a sneering smile, was beginning to look uneasy.

The murmur of the faraway crowd was rising into a drone, and occasional shouts were audible above the curiously menacing undertones. Johnson darted a glance out of the window, and then got up to look over toward the Midway. Russ noticed that the distinctive noises of the celebration had been submerged in that ever-increasing roar of men's voices.

Hopkins cleared his throat.

"I am at a loss to explain your insinuations——"

There came the noise of footsteps on the platform, and Barrett plunged in the door.

"They've got wise out there, and the whole mob is on the way here. They want Johnson—they're talking about tar and feathers—here they come——"

Russ was the first to the door, followed by Sibley, Barrett, and Mory. As they reached the platform the fringes of a veritable tidal wave of men surged against the car.

"Come on out, you thief!" bellowed the leader, a big chap in uniform whose round face seemed good-natured, even then. The mob, which seemed to include about every man on the grounds, was not ugly but it was determined.

Russ hurled the leader back from the steps. Mory was yelling for them to stand back, but the pressure from the rear was irresistible. Russ, on one step, Sibley on the other, and Mory and Barrett in the middle, fought back the mob. Russ, his blue eyes

glinting with the primeval joy of the half-good-natured struggle, hurled back man after man. Groping arms found the young flyer's legs, and sought to pull him down, but Russ, kicking and clawing like a red-headed wild-cat, struggled back to his post. He heard the whistle of a train from a near-by depot as he whirled to resume the fray.

Abruptly the temper of the crowd changed into something ugly and menacing. The fighting grew fiercer, and solid fists collided with jaws and cheeks. From the rear of the crowd came persistent calls of "get the crook!"

Then there was the thudding of footsteps inside the car. Some of the mob had entered through the other end.

"Get over here and hold these steps!" gasped Russ.

The compartment was filled with flushed men—but Johnson was not there.

"He jumped out the window a few minutes ago," Hopkins told the men in a voice that shook. "I think he took the money for the last two days—I tried to make myself heard——"

"Ten to one he got that train," shouted Russ above the tumult. "I'll get him in jigtime, with the plane."

There came an abrupt termination of the noise without, as a pistol shot cracked. It was the Ranger, firing in the air. It was as though the crowd sensed new developments—and also that the Texas Rangers' representative had decided that the party had proceeded as far as it was going to.

Russ got in the first words to the mob.

"Johnson's skipped with the money. Probably on that train. Anyway, I'll catch him at the next stop or two—by air."

There was silence, then loud shouts of "Attaboy, Lieutenant!" Under cover of the noise, Russ ordered Mory to get the plane warmed up. There was no particular hurry—he could overtake the train easily. Johnson would not have taken the money had he not figured on catching the train—the depot was only a few hundred yards from the siding. If captured, he had a reasonable alibi—for he did own the carnival, and most of the money was technically his, and he had been threatened by a mob.

"Listen, you boys," said Sibley, his voice raised a trifle. Like magic, quiet fell over the buzzing crowd. "Colonel Hopkins doesn't care to make any speech. I'm going to substitute for him, and I aim to say what I got to in about one minute. This is a fine exhibition you've put up for the Fourth of July or any day. If this country means anything it means a square deal to everybody, doesn't it? And you turn yourselves intuh a mob. Thought you were bein' patriotic, didn't yuh, because yuh wanted tuh take the law intuh your own hands? I'm ashamed o' my home town.

"One more thing, hombres. If there was less flag-wavin' and loud patriotic shoutin' one day a year, and more of the real stuff spread out over the other three hundred and sixty-four yuh wouldn't

be in the midst of a nasty mess like this. Yuh got votes, haven't yuh? You're Americans, ain't yuh? Then why don't yuh take enough interest in your own town and your own country to see that it ain't the victim of some four-flushin', loud-mouthed, double-crossin' birds who're runnin' things because you-all ain't got enough interest in your own town to see to it that it's run right? Just about every ache in Dalman's bones—and that goes double fur the whole U. S. A.—is because your patriotism don't go far enough—nor deep enough. You-all fought in the war—keep on fighting against other kinds o' enemies."

The noise of the Jenny's horsepower motor became audible, and Russ, who had been listening absorbedly, was compelled to slip out through the car. He could hear Sibley still talking as he left.

He ran for the ship, which was now idling after the warm-up. He was greeted by Mory, who held his chief's helmet and goggles in his hand.

"Ready to ramble, sir," he said.

Russ did not bother with the helmet, but slipped the goggles over his head and hopped into the cockpit. An instant's scrutiny was enough to satisfy him that the temperature, oil pressure, and r.p.m. were satisfactory. He strapped his belt, and gave the ship the gun.

It picked up speed rapidly, and in a few seconds he eased back on the stick. The sturdy little plane took the air smoothly. He did not bother to circle

for altitude before starting, but wasted no time. In a half minute the ship was roaring down the railroad track, less than a hundred feet high.

The train had made one stop, evidently, at the first small town. It was halfway to the next when he caught it. He flew on ahead, and in three minutes had sighted the next station. There was no possible landing field near it——

Without hesitation he made his decision. The street of the town was very wide, and almost deserted. Not a car was moving, and there were only a few parked along the curb. Evidently every one was celebrating the Fourth somewhere on the outskirts of the town. There were only a few pedestrians.

He cut the throttle, and glided down as slowly as possible above the street. Dumbfounded spectators stood rooted in their tracks as he landed. The ship rolled to a stop not two hundred yards from the depot.

He allowed it to idle, and was out of the cockpit in time to greet the first curious arrival.

"Is the town policeman anywhere around?" he demanded.

"No—what's up?" the big man whom he addressed replied.

"I need help," Russ told him, and to the two dozen men he explained his mission. From around every corner fresh onlookers hove in sight; so he was compelled to ask one of the men to guard the ship. Followed by at least a dozen others, he went to the

depot to await the train, which was whistling for the station.

They found Johnson in the smoking car, and bundled him off, protesting blasphemously. None too gently, they propelled him toward the idling ship. Russ bound the terrified showman's hands behind his back, and with the gleeful aid of many hands lifted him into the rear cockpit and strapped him in securely. The two bundles of bills and the bag of silver which they had found Russ cached under the cushion in the front cockpit.

His chuckling aides cleared the street for the take-off, and a moment later the Jenny was speeding down the hard-packed highway, tail in the air. After he had brought it to an altitude which assured him of clearing the buildings, he circled around, and shortly afterward left the waving hats of the townspeople behind and was speeding down the track toward Dalman.

As the fairgrounds came in sight he looked around at the carnival man. Johnson's face was a sickly greenish-white. Suddenly an idea smote Russ which caused his face to expand in a beatific grin.

"My exhibition is about due," he soliloquized with sinful satisfaction, and straightway started to gain altitude. As he circled the grounds, climbing steadily upward, he could see that the thousands of eyes below were focussed on his ship. The scene of the celebration was a white sea of upturned faces.

At four thousand feet he started. He nosed down

until the speed was terrific, and then pulled back on the stick smoothly. The ship arced around in a perfect loop. A zoom to save altitude, using the excess speed, then a stall, and from that into a rapid three-turn tailspin. As the ship swooped out of the spin in answer to stick and rudder he sent it into an Immelman turn which caused it to hang momentarily on its back. A few graceful wingturns, and then a falling leaf, wherein the plane fluttered downward like a dried leaf at the mercy of a hurricane. As he came out of that maneuver, which is hard on stomachs, he looked around. Johnson was hanging limply over the side. In the language of the flying corps, he had unmistakably "snapped his cakes."

Town Marshal Hank Kiefer, strangely chastened, was waiting to receive the feeble prisoner, and Russ also handed him the money. The cheering crowd which milled around the ship was one broad grin as they watched.

"Yuh should've been here, Lieutenant," Mory told him later. "Even Hopkins finally made a short speech and admitted he'd been wrong—but not the half of it. That'll come out when this here Johnson comes to testify to try to save his hide. He's bound to tell about some arrangement lettin' that crooked stuff by—and who he made it with. Hopkins brought 'em here. He don't hold no hand now—too scairt tuh peep. And boy, yuh should've heard this Ranger layin' 'em out! He could 'a' been killed for what he told 'em.

"Johnson's assistant come clean about the receipts, too. He's scairt to death. Barrett and some o' the others have got it all fixed up tuh start some kind o' society tuh take in all soldier voters and make sure the town's run right. That boy Barrett can see light fur the first time, I guess, now that the powerful bozos that've been houndin' him are roped and hogtied."

"He looks like a new man," agreed Russ. "That's great."

"Sure is," agreed the grizzled old non-com. His eyes held a twinkle in their depths as he added: "Pretty good day's work, Lieutenant, even fur the Fourth. We give 'em their money's worth, too. Supposed tuh give one exhibition, and doggone if we ain't give 'em plenty, from prize-fightin' tuh cookie-poppin', with the assistance of everybody on the lot!"

Russ grinned, and next day went back to Donovan Field with a contented light in his eye. Experience was steadying him.

THE DAWN PATROL

TWO YEARS LATER

ALONG the Mexican border, from ocean to gulf, there stretches a land that still stubbornly resists the march of civilization. There are hundreds of miles of untamed mesquite wilderness; towering, deserted mountains; far-stretching deserts. And down there the age-long struggle of the border is still being fought—oftentimes with weapons and methods as primitive as the setting in which the contest goes on.

Since the war, however, those thousands of miles between the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf of California are dotted by small airdromes which have appeared like mushrooms in the midst of the chaparral, as at Marfa, or nestling in the mountains, as at Sanderson, or perhaps close to a modern city, like El Paso. And there rise from these isolated fields, several times a day, great DeHaviland airplanes of the Army Air Service border patrol, manned by picked rangers of the air who keep watch on the tempestuous country below while their mighty craft hurl themselves along at a hundred miles an hour over the far-famed Big Bend or the flaming deserts of the far southwest.

Because the terrain over which they fly is the most deadly to be found anywhere, and because their duties—the prevention of smuggling and other lawlessness in the most lawless section of the country—are so important, the border patrol is a blue-ribbon outfit.

Of all the squadrons along the Rio Grande, the most famous was at McMullen, the eastern end of the long fifteen-hundred-mile strip of border which the airmen patrol. Because of the unusual character of the McMullen squadron's flying men, plus the abnormal number of opportunities that Dame Fortune had given them to distinguish themselves, the outfit had become the best-known on the Rio Grande.

On this particular day they were entertaining two distinguished visitors for lunch in the messhall. Lieutenant Russ Farrell was holding his tongue as befitted the newest and youngest member of the flight. It was not hard to do. From the day he had become a member of the most famous group in the service he had been not only as proud as an enthusiastic young airman can be, but he had also been diffident before the well-known veterans of the air with whom he was associated. Although he was a flyer of three years' experience, now, and a good one, he was new to the Rio Grande country and the duties the patrol entailed. As he told George Framer, an observer who had joined the flight with him:

"I feel like some darn green freshman down here!"

He was a freshman on the border, but far from a freshman in the air. The two and a half years of flying since the day when he had given his first exhibition flight at Dalman had made of him a flyer whose skill was well-known throughout the service—and the years had done much for him in other ways, as well. Dozens of times, as an instructor, photographic pilot, or pursuit pilot flying little single-seated scout ships at various fields all over the country he had lived through moments where life hung in the balance, and where his safety depended on his skill, plus luck. Three times he had been in the hospital after bad wrecks. An airman crashes, sometimes, no matter what his skill, and Russ had had his share. Time after time he had stood and watched while comrades of his were killed—sometimes through happenings which neither they nor any other pilot could help.

As a result, he was subtly different from the eager youngster who had commenced flying early in 1918. There was a look of calm capability about him, now, and in his steady gray eyes there was the look which grows from habitually looking far into the distance. One can see it in the puckered eyes of western plainsmen. And when a fellow has looked death in the eye a hundred times, and beaten it by a whisker, there is bound to come a certain poise and calm assurance which can only be the result of experience. Nearly a thousand hours in the air had tanned

his face to a deep brown, and put tiny weather-crinkles around his eyes, and made of him more than a rattling good flyer. He was not yet twenty-one, but he was a man.

He had been delighted when, a few weeks before, he had received his orders to report to the McMullen flight of the border patrol. For it was an honor, and the whole service so considered it, to be picked for the blue-ribbon outfit of the flying corps. It was a reward for years of faithful service at fields from coast to coast. Mineola, Long Island; Rockwell Field, California, where he had first learned to fly single-seaters; Selfredge Field, Michigan, and many other fields were known to him. He had instructed cadets, flown photographic ships for hours taking pictures of rivers and mountains for the geological survey, and made a hundred long cross-country trips, sometimes carrying high officials of the army on special missions. And his assignment to the border patrol meant that he had proved himself a hundred times, as an officer and as a flyer.

Nevertheless, as has been mentioned, he was new to the border, and his past experience had not swollen his head. The same old helmet which he had worn since his first trip as a cadet had no bursting seams, and was still amply large to enclose his red-haired cranium. To-day, in addition to his humility before aces such as Jimmy Jennings and Captain Kennard, the C. O., and famous flyers like lean drawling Tex MacDowell and little Pete Miller, he was listening

with all his ears to their guests. Sheriff Bill Trowbridge, a leonine old man who had been friend and partner of the McMullen flight for two years, had brought old Sergeant Gates out to lunch, and to hear those two old-timers swap reminiscences of their life enforcing the law along the river was to get a chapter out of the old west. What made it more impressive to Russ was that they were talking, not of the old days, but of things that had happened within the last year.

Captain Kennard finally induced the taciturn Gates to tell the story of his most recent exploit. Two border flyers, from the Laredo flight, had made a forced landing in Mexico and had been captured by bandits under the command of José Rentara, a notorious outlaw. He had held them for ransom, under threat of death if it was not forthcoming. Ranchers had raised the $15,000 demanded by the bandit (for the native government was powerless to help) and had chosen Gates as the emissary to go after them. Gates had paid $7,500 for Peters, one of the flyers, put the airman back of him on the horse, and carried him the few miles to the river and across into the United States. When he returned to the hide-out of the bandits after Davidson, the other man, he had thundered in at full gallop, swept Davidson up behind him, and ridden away under a fusillade of bullets without paying the second installment of the ransom.

"The birds've been whisperin' that Rentara has

told the world he's aimin' tuh get me good fur that," chuckled Gates. "And he's a brave Spig, too—when he's behind yuh."

The stocky, weather-beaten, bowlegged little non com told it all as though it was the most ordinary thing in the world. His thin brown hair was plastered down in a neat part, and his gnarled brown hands occasionally smoothed it as he talked. His puckered eyes, with sun-crinkles around them, twinkled humorously as he finished.

"By the way, now that I've spoke my piece fur my meal, let's hear the right lay about this business o' some o' you boys stoppin' some cattle-rustlers here a while back. I wasn't around——"

A chorus of chuckles—as a dozen lounging, tanned flyers focused their eyes on Russ and George Framer. Russ joined in the laugh, although his face flushed a bit below his freckles.

"I'll tell yuh!" boomed the sheriff. "Young Russ Farrell, here, and Framer was new to the flight, and on their first patrol. Early mornin' it was. They seen a herd o' cattle bein' taken across the river down here about forty mile, in a right deserted spot. It looked to them like rustlin' 'em across the river, bein' at dawn and in a quiet spot thataway. So Russ he gets his guns workin' good, and starts divin' and zoomin' around. Within two minutes every Spig vaquero was under a rock, the American punchers was concealed until nothin' but the blue smoke o' their blasphemy was visible,

and there was cattle stampedin', head up an' tail up, all over the state o' Texas, the Rio Grande, and some o' Mexico. I understand it took old Bill Appleby, that owned 'em, and his whole outfit a month to get 'em herded together again. Yuh see, Barney, these boys hadn't noticed the customs inspectors standing on the bank."

Gates laughed quietly, while his keen twinkling old eyes probed appraisingly into Farrell's blue ones.

"Hereafter, customs inspectors are aiming to wear a black star on a white background on the top of their hats," drawled Tex MacDowell. "Although several of them have said that it might be safer just to stick up their hands whenever they see an airplane."

"Shucks, how was I to know they were customs men?" demanded Russ. "Or George, either. If any of the rest of you birds had been on patrol, you probably wouldn't have noticed the cattle even, to say nothing of the inspectors!"

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" rumbled Trowbridge, and Framer succeeded in grinning sincerely for the first time.

Farrell himself had not taken the thing too much to heart, although the laugh had spread from Brownsville to San Diego. He had endured the good-natured joshing of the other flyers without losing his temper, but at the same time the incident had always rankled. He had got off on the wrong foot, and at the very start of his career as a border-patrolman.

Sometimes he felt as though he would give a year of his life to make good in front of the bunch—to prove to them that he had a right to be one of them. A half-dozen flying fields knew Rusty Farrell as an extraordinarily good flyer, but down here on the border he was an unknown quantity.

Buried for the moment in his thoughts, he was a few seconds behind the others in getting up from the table. The flyers, led by Sheriff Trowbridge's six-feet-four form, were trooping out the door as Russ arose. Gates paused beside him.

"Don't let that gang of unregenerate young devils kid yuh too much, youngster," he remarked, his tight mouth relaxing into a smile. "If yuh'd done any different than what yuh did, yuh'd ought've been courtmartialed. It's been known, down here, that a man shot too quick, but there's been more times when he didn't shoot quick enough. Ever go huntin'?"

"Nothing I'd rather do!" stated Russ heartily.

"My outfit—I got a cavalry patrol down the line outside o' Calvin—is right in the middle of pretty good huntin' territory. Drop down some Saturday—there's a pasture near by where yuh can land—an' we'll get a few rabbits fur supper, anyhow."

"I'd be tickled to death, sir!" returned the flyer, and never thought how peculiar it was for a full-fledged first lieutenant to be saying "sir" to a sergeant. That is, from the army point of view.

Gates nodded, and for a moment seemed to be looking the rangy, broad-shouldered young flyer

up and down. Then he waved one hand from the doorway.

"*Adios!*" he smiled, and went out. A little later Tex MacDowell flew him the fifty miles to his station.

At dinner that night Gates was the principal topic of conversation and afterward, when Sheriff Trowbridge came out to play cards, still further light was thrown on the hard-bitten old army man's career on the border. He was a pistol expert by the army rating, with either hand, and the fastest man on the draw in the border country. So greatly was he feared and hated by the lawless element on both sides of the river that he rarely went away from camp without a bodyguard of ten or a dozen men.

"There's been dozens o' hombres swore to get him!" the sheriff assented in answer to Farrell's query. "About a year back he got a note from the brother of a Spig that'd killed a man, askin' for a parley about the murderer givin' himself up. Barney went, but first, as per usual, his men sneak around and hide right handy. As Barney walked up to this 'dobe shack he sees a gun pokin' out the window. Well, believe it or not, he draws and shoots before this Spig aims and fires—consequently this hombre don't shoot then, nor ever thereafter."

When Russ went to bed that night—early, because he was to make the dawn patrol west—his dreams were a weird mixture of quick drawing, preternaturally accurate shooting, cattle-rustling, smuggling, and divers other border activities in which Gates

had taken a hand, with invariable success on the side of the law.

The alarm clock awakened him at four o'clock, and as he bathed and dressed in the chill morning air which poured into his tent he could hear the roar of two Liberty motors on the line. The other flyers slept through the din peacefully—all except Jimmy Jennings and Framer, who had the eastern patrol, and Pop Cravath, who was to be his own observer on the beat west toward Laredo. It was just beginning to get light when the four gathered in the messhall to be served with bacon, eggs, and coffee by the Chink cook. The Chink was variously known as Sing Hi, Sing Lo, and Sing Loud, and answered to any one of the three labels.

The morning mist swathed the airdrome in a pearly blanket as the flyers made their way to the line. The tiny airdrome was bounded to east and west by corrugated iron hangars, and on the south by the sleeping tents and frame administration buildings of the flight. To the north there was a low fence.

The two four-hundred-and-fifty-horsepower Libertys were idling, but nevertheless occasional streamers of fire split the half-light. Pop Cravath, so-called because he was over thirty and was getting bald, shivered in his leather coat.

"Why any living man wants to be fool enough to do this sort of stuff for a living I don't know," he barked. Pop never liked to get up in the morning.

Russ grinned, but did not answer. He wondered

whether part of the veteran observer's irritability was due to the fact that he was forced to fly with a green border pilot. The only real thing he had done had been a fiasco of the first water—he couldn't blame the fiery Cravath if he did not feel so pleasant over riding with the most inexperienced man in the outfit.

He got in the front cockpit, and surveyed the maze of instruments that told the story of the Liberty. The great DeHaviland bomber, weighing close to two tons and with seventy feet of wingspread, made the training planes in which Russ had learned to fly, and later instructed cadets, seem like toys, and the tremendous motor in front of him looked and sounded like the gigantic power-plant it was. He read the story of the needles swiftly: air pressure, oil pressure, the amount the battery was charging, the gasoline gauge, the tachometer. He made sure the spark was advanced all the way, and then tried the motor on each of the switches. A Liberty has double-ignition, for greater safety. He could detect no flaw in the even rhythm of the twelve cylinders, and finally, with both switches on, he gave it a final test with the throttle wide open. Mechanics on the wings bent to their work to hold the ship back, and on the tail another man actually leaned against the terriffic propeller blast as he fought to keep the tail from coming up.

Russ brought the throttle back, set his goggles, and nodded. The wheel blocks were pulled, and he opened the motor shutters, for the Centigrade ther-

mometer stood at 88, within two degrees of boiling. The next moment the DeHaviland was flashing across the hard-packed sand.

The airspeedmeter jumped from forty to fifty, then sixty, and finally seventy-five miles an hour. He eased back on the stick, a few yards from the fence, and the D. H. shot upward. He leveled off, banked, and as he circled the airdrome for altitude throttled the motor to fifteen hundred revolutions a minute. Then he shifted his Colt .45 in its holster to a more comfortable position, read the instruments again, and settled down for his three-hundred-mile trip along the Rio Grande. After straightening out for the trip west he kept the DeHaviland in a gradual climb. He intended to fly the patrol at an altitude of ten thousand feet.

He was a bit self-conscious about his flying, for this was the first time he had piloted any one but George Framer, who was as new to the border as himself. Pop Cravath had been accustomed to the air work of men like MacDowell and Mallory and Jennings—flyers whose names were bywords in France and on the border. Probably his own handling of a DeHaviland, a ship on which he had had little experience, would seem rough and clumsy to the observer.

He did not know that the critical Cravath, in the back seat, was nodding his approval. There is no way to fool an expert airman about a man's flying ability—daredevil stunts make him yawn, where a steep sideslip into a small field and a trim three-

point landing will cause a glint to appear in his eye. Cravath watching his pilot's smooth, effortless banks, without slip or skid, and noticing the jarless way in which he straightened his ship and the entire lack of any over-control, had stamped him within thirty seconds as a real flyer, which is the only kind there is room for on the border. Fields are few down there, and emergencies many.

Fifteen miles from the airdrome the bomber was driving along at a hundred and ten miles an hour, and the altimeter read an even two miles high. Eight miles south, although it seemed only a step, the Rio Grande lay like a twisting ribbon of silver. Northward, open fields merged into unending billows of mesquite which swept away as far as the eye could see. The rising sun was beginning to burn away the mother-of-pearl mist, although the ground was still vague below the vapory covering. Fingers of chaparral projected from the main mass, sometimes extending down to the river. South of the stream lay Mexico—a seemingly unending mass of tangled wilderness.

As Russ looked down at the sinister panorama sweeping away to the southern horizon, the stories he had heard yesterday seemed perfectly natural and believable. That bandits lurked in those hidden fastnesses, and that ignorance, squalor, and crime stalked along the byways of the wilderness was utterly in keeping with the impression it gave him as it sprawled in the dawn. Down there the struggle

of the border had started, and was kept going—perhaps even now its denizens were lifting their eyes to the speck flying above them—and hating it. He remembered what the sheriff had said: that Gates rarely stirred from his camp without a body-guard of picked men, and that every outlaw on the border—Mexican and American alike—wanted to get him. To a lesser extent, they hated the patrol, likewise. Ships came home periodically with bullet holes in them.

So immersed was Russ in his thoughts that he did not know exactly how far he had flown when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked around, half-startled, to meet Cravath's eyes. The observer looked like an owl in his close-fitting helmet and huge goggles, behind which his eyes were suddenly blazing. With his field glass he pointed down.

Russ scrutinized the ground, like a scene painted on canvas two miles below, but could see no sign of life whatever save a lazy pillar of smoke ten or twelve miles ahead. He turned again, and Cravath motioned with a peremptory hand. It was the signal to go down, and Russ obeyed without question.

He throttled the motor to twelve hundred, closed the motor shutters, and the great DeHaviland circled earthward like a mammoth bird. He was tingling with the prospect of excitement, and as he alternately spiraled and side-slipped his ship he waited impatiently for some news from Cravath. He watched the ground closely, but at that height he

could not see a sign of life, to say nothing of anything demanding investigation.

Again he felt Cravath's grip, and turned to receive a folded note. He smoothed it out with his one free hand, and scanned it briefly.

"Saw shooting around clearing right below us. One man in ruined cabin on northern edge—two others in thick clump of mesquite eastern edge."

Like a flash he banked his plane more steeply, until the wings were almost at right angles to the ground, and looked down. The mesquite was very thin below them, and there were two clearings in it separated by a line of chaparral. The smaller one was pretty well filled with undergrowth, but the larger one, lying east and west, was clear except for a few stumps. On the northern edge of it was a blackened heap, apparently the remains of a cabin which had been burned.

Again Cravath signaled him, and passed a note.

"Fly on ahead a few miles before you come down further. Then fly back low. If they notice us coming down they'll run if there's anything up. Go ahead ten miles, and fly back low."

They had come down two thousand feet, and the difference between eight and ten thousand would be unnoticeable from the ground. Possibly they had not even noticed the ship at that height. Russ swung westward again, and kept his ship in a gradual dive. The airspeed meter jumped to a hundred and forty miles an hour in the power dive.

To make sure of not nearing the quarry, if there was a quarry, he went ahead fifteen miles, and by that time was only five thousand feet high. In four more minutes he had jockeyed his ship down to a thousand feet without cooling the motor too fast, he thought, and was pointed back eastward. He went into a steeper dive, and the wires began to scream shrilly and the big ship to vibrate wickedly as the speed jumped to a hundred and sixty miles an hour.

As it shot toward the ground, pointed back toward the clearing, Russ noticed a group of tents a few miles south, on the bank of the river. He made a quick calculation. They had been in the air about a half-hour, Gates had said that his patrol was forty or fifty miles west of McMullen, near Galvas—that must be his outfit, and the small collection of houses a few miles away, also on the river bank, must be Galvas. He turned to Cravath, stooping to avoid the terrific airstream, and pointed toward the tents, now almost out of sight as they came lower. He pointed to them, and then ahead, signaling the possibility of getting the cavalry on the job.

Cravath shook his head, and Russ turned to his work. He was almost scraping the trees now, and it behooved him to watch carefully. In a moment another note was thrust forward, and he took time to read it quickly.

"We must make sure—no wild-goose chases," it read.

Through the tense expectations that filled him Russ was conscious of his greenness again. Somehow he seemed to be always wrong, in the judgment of the experienced men. He had never thought of going on ahead and then coming back to avoid scaring any one who might be indulging in a little early-morning murder, and his suggestion about the soldiers had been vetoed.

These thoughts were erased almost immediately from his mind, however, for the clearing was in sight, a mile ahead. He turned the motor full on, and with a louder roar the ship leaped forward, fifty feet off the ground. He banked slightly to lay his course over the ruined cabin.

Instinctively, as it flashed closer, his eyes found the two Marlin machine guns which lay flat on the cowling in front of him, geared to shoot through the propeller. No telling what might lie ahead, if Cravath was right——

Like magic the figure of a man leaped into view. He was lying flat behind the charred, half-fallen walls of the cabin, and the remains of the roof almost hid him. The next second, Russ, his head thrust over the side, saw that the man was in khaki. As they flashed over him the man waved a hand at them and the next second the rifle in his hand spoke. Russ could see the smoke. And it was aimed at a clump of mesquite on the eastern edge of the clearing. The cabin itself was midway of the northern side.

In a second the ship was roaring over that group of gnarled little trees. At first Russ could see nothing, and then he got a brief glimpse of two men lying on the ground, in the shelter of some undergrowth.

He threw the DeHaviland into a left bank, and as he did so his heart came into his mouth. The mighty Liberty faltered a moment, and then cut in again strongly. The ship swept north of the clearing, and passed behind the cabin. The soldier's gun was silent now, and he made no movement.

Russ turned to Cravath. His judgment was to fly back and drop a note to the cavalry patrol, and then come back and see to it, with machine guns, that no one escaped until the ground men got there.

Cravath was writing busily. As Russ banked again, to fly back over the clearing, he read it:

"I'll radio McMullen for more ships. We'll hold them until they get here. Under our guns the other men can land. That looks like Gates down there to me, and there's something up. Ships will be quicker than the soldiers coming fifteen miles, and while we're gone the two in the mesquite might be able to get away."

Farrell nodded his understanding, and saw Cravath get to work on the key. He must have unreeled the antenna while writing the note. Russ banked gradually to avoid snapping off the "fish" on the end of the line, and by the time he had straightened back again for the clearing Cravath had started to

reel it in again. That he was satisfied to send the message only once was a silent testimonial to the observer's confidence in his skill—sending wireless without written words, and with a motor bellowing away ahead so that the ear cannot aid in accuracy, is mighty skilful operating.

Cravath pointed ahead, and then described a circle in the air with his finger. Russ nodded. To circle around the clearing, with the threat of the guns ever-present, would keep the men safely rounded up until the arrival of help.

The ship was a hundred yards west of the clearing, pointed east, and perhaps a hundred feet high when the Liberty sputtered again. Russ straightened with a snap, and his eyes swept the instrument board. Air pressure all right, plenty of oil pressure, battery still charging——

It caught briefly, and then the mighty rhythm was broken again. This time it sputtered very badly—not more than four of the cylinders were working. The speed slackened. He worked the throttle desperately, to clean out the motor. Water in the gas or a plug in the feed line might be responsible.

But the throttle work did not help. He was just over the fringe of trees on the edge of the field. Like a flash he nosed down, banked to the right, and then to the left, nose in the air. While the ship was in the left bank he put on top or right-rudder. The ship went into a terrific sideslip. That was the only thing to do—if he did not kill his altitude he

could never make the field. The ship dropped, going forward scarcely at all. Just off the ground he straightened, and then with left rudder went into a sweeping skid sideward to kill speed. The field was slightly rolling, and there were a half-dozen stumps in it. With his head over the side to see better, he jockeyed the ship with all his skill. He held it in the air as long as he could, to make a stall landing on the rough terrain. He avoided the first stump by a hair, and then the ship dropped. The second it hit the ground he was forced to give it full left rudder and ground loop to avoid two ugly stumps. It swept around, dragging a wing-skid. The right wing barely missed some of the trees on the northern rim of the clearing.

With the nose pointed west, they were an open target for the men in the mesquite. The sputtering motor had plenty of power to taxi the ship, however, and he pushed the throttle all the way on. The popping, spitting Liberty did succeed in keeping their speed, and the left rudder swung the ship around until it was pointed east again. The big motor ahead of them was against any bullets. Twice the nose dipped until it seemed that the propeller would be shattered as the plane rolled over small hillocks, but they came to rest intact.

A scheme sprang into Farrell's mind almost as soon as those crowded moments of ultra-skilful flying were over. His hand dropped to the machine-gun control. The angle of the guns attached to the

ship was upward, and they would fire over the trees into the air. He pressed the handle, and a sudden deadly "rat-a-tat-tat!" cut viciously through the idling of the crippled motor.

Cravath was leaning over him, crouched low to keep the protection of the motor.

"You can't hit anything now!" he yelled.

"No—but I can put the fear of God into whoever's over there and keep them off us!" shouted Russ.

Cravath nodded, and grinned.

"Not bad, youngster! It's lucky I radioed—listen to that thing, will you!" he interrupted himself.

All at once the Liberty's idling became even once more, as all the cylinders cut in.

"It was water in the gas! Wouldn't that frost your eyeballs—cutting in now!"

Pop's disgust was profound.

"Let's cut it—the self-starter'll work all right with the motor so warm—and hail yonder soldier. I'm sure it's Gates."

As he cut the motor Russ craned his neck over the side in an endeavor to see whether the men in the mesquite were visible. They were not, but the whine of a bullet close overhead made him seek shelter abruptly.

"We tipped our hand by firing the machine gun —they think we landed on purpose to get them!" Cravath shouted.

Russ wondered why they didn't beat a retreat. Evidently they preferred to fight it out, believing

that their only hope of escape was to put the flyers out of action.

"Ahoy there!" bellowed Cravath toward the ruins. They were less than fifty yards away.

There was no answer, although he shouted again and again. The sun was fairly high above the horizon now, and shone down blithesomely on the deserted scene.

"They must have got him!" Cravath said slowly. "Those fellows in the bushes shot at us—they've got him!"

"I'll go and see!" Russ said quietly.

"Don't be a fool! The other ships'll be here in twenty minutes or so——"

But Russ hit the ground with a thud. He ran back toward the thin chaparral on the western edge of the field, keeping the ship between himself and the two unknown men. Bullets whined around him, but he was not hit. Although the shelter of the mesquite was not any too secure, it helped, and the marksmen were more than a hundred yards away by now. He dodged around the clearing, keeping to cover, and working toward the cabin.

It had been an ungovernable impulse that had caused him to start so abruptly. He thought of the kindly old borderman who had been at lunch the day before, and the thoughtfulness which had bidden him to stop and invite the youngest flyer there to go hunting with him. It was more than mere duty that impelled him to do what he was doing—there

was a warm personal feeling which would not let him rest while Gates might be lying there, desperately wounded.

As he came to the edge of the mesquite opposite the cabin he could not see the man lying within the ruins at all. It was a ten-yard run to the shelter of the broken, charred timbers, and he made it in jig time, stooping low. He heard the double spat of two guns, and then a third report from the ship. Evidently Cravath was on the job.

He tumbled head first into the midst of the wreckage. A soldier with sergeant's stripes on the sleeve of his shirt was lying there, face down. A rifle was by his side, and a Colt was still strapped around him. A string of four rabbits had been thrown in the corner.

He turned the man over. It was Gates. The veteran's eyelids flickered, and there was a smile in his eyes. The front of his shirt was a mass of blood, and there was a bloody froth at his lips.

"Lucky shot—lung," he whispered. "Rentara's —over there!"

As he tore off Gates' shirt to use for a bandage Farrell's whirling brain subconsciously figured what had happened. Rentara had been lurking near Gates' camp, secretly, to make good his threat. Gates had slipped out for an early morning hunting trip, been followed, and cornered here.

He bound the ugly hole with his handkerchief, secured by the shirt. He felt instinctively that

there was no time to waste—Gates must be got to a doctor without any delay whatever. And there was but one way to do it.

The freckles on the pilot's face stood out in startling contrast to the utter whiteness of the skin as he put his eye to a chink and surveyed the field briefly. He decided he could carry out his plan. His big body was quivering with nervous eagerness, and he strove to control the almost unbearable tension which was torturing every nerve in his body.

Keeping low, he gently carried Gates, who seemed to be completely unconscious now, to the edge of the wreckage. Then he picked him up, and at a lumbering run started for the mesquite.

Again the bullets flew. He remembered that Mexicans were notoriously poor shots, but nevertheless it was a wonderful relief to put even a few small trees between himself and those bullets. Cravath had returned the fire, and as Russ gained the mesquite sudden silence fell.

He was breathing in gasps when he reached the edge of the field again, behind the ship. Gates was an absolute dead weight in his arms. He stopped a moment to regain his breath, and laid Gates down.

In a few seconds he picked him up again, and ran for the quiet ship. Cravath was looking ahead, the Colt ready in his hands. He used the machine gun again for the moral effect, but apparently the outlaws had fathomed the uselessness of the guns on the ground, and they fired briskly. The ship was

a partial screen, however. Russ was conscious of the fear that they might bore the radiator with a bullet—if they only knew how easy it would be to put the plane out of commission!

Only a few feet from the DeHaviland he tripped on a stump. He staggered sideward, and at that instant came a searing pain in his right arm and a heavy impact that nearly spun him around. He kept his feet, however, and though his arm was numb for a minute he did not drop Gates' limp body.

Cravath was on the ground when he staggered up to the ship, and helped him get Gates into the rear cockpit. Russ raised the sleeve of his shirt, and found a deep furrow through the flesh of his upper arm. It was bleeding profusely, and his shirt was already soaked in blood.

"Just a scratch," he gasped.

"What's the idea?" barked Cravath.

"He's shot through the lung—got to get him to a doctor right away!" Russ returned, swaying slightly.

"How? You can't take off here——"

"Yes, we can get off!"

"You've gone nuts, I tell you! Look at those stumps—and those trees! You couldn't get over them in a thousand years! The other ships——"

"I can get through that opening—and Gates can't wait!"

"Don't be a fool. If necessary, by the mighty, I rank you and I order you not to do it! You'll kill yourself and Gates——"

Farrell's mouth set tightly, and there was a hard sheen in his eyes. Impulsive words sprang to his lips, but he checked them and said with painful slowness:

"I'm sorry, Cravath. I'm new—but I'm pilot, and I've got the say, and I'm going to take off!"

For a moment it seemed that the fiery Cravath was going to leap at him bodily. Their eyes locked in silent struggle. Then Cravath shrugged his shoulders, and silently climbed in the rear cockpit.

In a few seconds Russ had the motor going. He jazzed the throttle a few times to clean out the spark plugs and make sure that the water was all gone from the carburetor jets. Then he set his goggles, and gave the ship the gun.

He was breathless, and his head was curiously light. And yet, as he took a grip on himself, it seemed that he possessed a miraculous clarity of vision and a sure confidence communicated from his brain to his hand.

He handled his rudder smoothly as the ship roared across the rough field, and swept it around the first stump with inches to spare. Then he swung a bit to the right, so that he would miss the second and last obstacle and still be able to keep a straight course. The trees were close ahead—as Cravath had said, it was impossible to get altitude enough to get over them. But there was a narrow opening, perhaps twenty feet wide, between two of the clumps. Straight for the covert of the two Mexicans went the

DeHaviland. A few rods from the trees the ship was scarcely five feet off the ground. That second Russ pulled up a trifle, and at the same time went into a steep right bank.

The right wing almost dragged the ground as the ship tipped up, but it curved through that narrow opening with inches to spare on either side. As the trees dropped behind, the ship was almost ready to slip into the ground through loss of speed. Russ straightened, dropped the nose, and picked up speed. It was fifty yards to the next line of mesquite. He stayed close to the ground to get all the speed he could. At the last minute he zoomed, and the overloaded bomber answered nobly by clearing the last trees by a scant foot. Again he had to drop the nose and fight to keep the ship from dropping into the mesquite through loss of flying speed, but he accomplished it. Then he straightened out for McMullen, and with the Liberty roaring along wide-open, just a few feet above the ground, the ship hurtled along on its way at the rate of two miles a minute.

Halfway to McMullen three DeHavilands in formation, flying low and fast, passed them. Russ wondered whether the Mexicans were making for the river—they'd be caught, anyhow. Eight miles on foot cannot be negotiated very swiftly.

The trip seemed endless. Close to the ground as they were, the speed appeared to be tremendous, but nevertheless McMullen seemed an infinite distance.

Subtle languor strove to overcome him. He was weakening fast from loss of blood—he had never thought, back there, about putting a bandage on his arm. It was just a flesh wound, but it was certainly bleeding . . .

With a start he caught himself drifting off into unconsciousness.

"You spineless, yellow, chicken-livered quitter!" he told himself bitterly, and literally forced himself into alertness.

So suddenly that it seemed miraculous the small yellow airdrome leaped into view. Russ swung northward, fighting himself far more than he fought the terrific airbumps called into being by the sun. He dropped down over the fence as slowly as he could: seventy miles an hour. As the ship hit the ground, bouncing slightly, he saw an ambulance scurrying across the field. They must have seen two men in the rear cockpit——

He fainted in the seat before he had cut the motor.

Russ was out for lunch next day, a bit weak, but otherwise all right. A big bandage on his arm, with a dressing underneath, was hidden by his shirt. Major Searles, the wizened, kindly old flight surgeon, had been the only visitor allowed in the tent, but he had given all the news. The Mexicans had been captured, and Gates would live.

As he entered the messhall for lunch the rest already were seated.

"Well, how's the terror of the cattle-rustlers?" inquired Tex MacDowell genially.

"Weak but willing," grinned Russ. "Who got the Spigs, and how?"

"Spotted 'em making the border, fired machine guns around 'em, they stuck up their hands pretty, and then one ship rode herd on 'em while the others landed and got 'em," stated Captain Kennard with a forkful of potatoes poised before his face. "One bandit chief and one fourth assistant deputy bandit lost for ever to Mexico!"

There was further casual conversation about the matter, and then the subject changed to a forthcoming dance. Russ was amazed, and barely restrained himself from breaking into speech about it all. Cravath had told them all about it, of course, and yet it seemed as though a thing like that should be the most interesting thing in the world.

He said little as he ate, but thought a good deal. Finally he grinned as he decided:

"The border is different from Bluefield, Massachusetts!"

Two days later, with most of the other flyers, he went to see Gates at the hospital. The old-timer smiled a greeting, and his puckered eyes were alight as he remarked:

"I'm expecting you down when I get out of bed, and we'll go out and make up for them rabbits I lost. Tradin' four rabbits fur two Spigs ain't noways even!"

That was all that was said about the adventure during the brief call, and Russ would have been something more—or less—than human had he not been surprised—and perhaps disappointed. He could not quite understand the attitude of these men——

Then it came to him. It meant that he was one of them. He had taken his place as a border patrolman—no longer a raw youngster to be handled carefully, encouraged, and trained. He had stepped into his niche, filled it, and they took it as a matter of course.

And to Russ there could be no greater reward.

THE SKYWAYMAN

IT WAS a blithesome Texas morning, than which there is nothing more blithesome when the border climate is on its good behavior. Russ reflected the flooding sunshine in his face and the snap of the air in his stride as he dashed for the messhall. He was a bit late, for the dozen other flyers of patrol were already deep in the morning feedbag. It was a month after his adventure with Sergeant Gates and all was well with the world, as far as Russ was concerned. Consequently he uplifted his voice in song as follows:

"I've got a girl, and she's six feet tall;
Keeps her head in the kitchen and her feet in the hall;
She's got a sister, down by the lake,
Who can rush around just like a rattlesnake!
And I'd walk ten thousand mi-i-i-les——"

"It'll just about mean that the whole flight'll be on their way to Verona before noon!" came the rasping voice of Captain Kennard, and Russ stopped his song abruptly. He ran up the steps and into the room where the flyers were lounging around the table.

"Who's going where before noon?" he inquired of all and sundry.

"I've forgotten whether you can read or not, but here's the paper," said Sleepy Spears gently, and the next second the page-wide headline struck Farrell's eyes like a blow.

"Verona Wiped Out by Tidal Wave!" screamed the heavy black type, and Russ read the vague news article underneath it quickly. Verona was a famous summer resort on the Gulf of Mexico, and the night before a great tidal wave, caused by some volcanic eruption on the floor of the sea, had inundated the town, which was built on the beach. Railroads, telegraph lines, telephones, and all other means of communication were wiped out, and the country behind the resort was flooded with several feet of water. There were no definite facts as to the extent of the disaster, due to the destruction of all communications with the flooded area, but the estimate of the correspondent was a thousand people dead, at least. Bodies floating in the Gulf, boats ruined for miles along the beach—and no possible way to estimate the horror of what might be going on in the inundated town.

"Just in case we're called, which we will be, listen to your assignments," went on the C. O. He told off four men to stay at McMullen to take care of the daily patrols along the Rio Grande, and ordered the other flyers to have musette bags packed, and their ships on the line ready to go at a moment's notice. Russ had barely gulped his coffee before McMullen, which was the most easterly flight of the

coast-to-coast patrol of the Army Air Service, was seething with activity. By nine o'clock five great DeHavilands were on the line ready for a takeoff, and five flyers and five observers were ready to go at a moment's notice.

At 9:45 the radio commenced to tick forth its message from department headquarters, and shortly after ten Captain Kennard, Tex MacDowell, Sleepy Spears, Jimmy Jennings, and Russ Farrell took off, in single file, rendezvoused at a thousand feet above the airdrome, drew into a close V-formation, and roared along eastward to the Gulf at a hundred and fifteen miles an hour.

The hundred-odd young men charged with the duty of patroling the tempestuous Mexican border were carefully selected for various qualities, and among them was flying ability. The far-stretching wastes of mesquite, ranges of towering mountains, and miles of blazing desert which make up the primeval panorama of the border from Texas to California require flying skill raised to the nth degree if the airmen are to survive long. And that formation, winging its way to the stricken city, was a thundering illustration of what the border patrolmen were. Each ship twenty-five feet back of the ship ahead, and twenty-five feet higher, and the same distance to one side—and always they held their position. A DeHaviland weighs more than a ton and a half, and travels at over a hundred miles an hour, and there are no brakes to apply. Only

infinitely delicate throttle handling, literally anticipating any increase or decrease in speed of the ship ahead, made that close formation possible.

Russ, handling his four-hundred-and-fifty horsepower craft with the skill which had become ever more sure and confident during his three years flying, took occasional brief looks at the ground two thousand feet below. Already there were signs of the débâcle which was ahead—fields practically covered with water, and streams running across roads instead of under their bridges. Twenty miles outside of Verona it became suddenly worse. The terrain looked like a great lake, with islands in it formed by low hills and deserted houses looming in gaunt bleakness from the shallow water. There were groups of people gathered on the hills, and down in the fields cattle were standing and starving, up to their bellies in water.

Russ felt his observer's hand on his shoulder, and the next moment Framer was yelling in his ear:

"I never loved a Liberty motor more!"

It was a reflection of the thought in Russ's own mind—a sudden realization that made his tanned face whiten a trifle and his rangy body tighten with the strain. The inundated ground was a constant reminder of the duty that lay just ahead—and for the first time he comprehended what that duty would mean to him. For Russ had never been able to shake himself loose from his fear of water.

He could swim, and frequently did so in indoor

pools. Years before, however, when he was ten years old, he had slipped away one morning at a Massachusetts beach to steal a dip. He had gone out farther than usual, and caught the undertow at its height. Never, to his dying day, would he forget the panic-stricken struggle to regain the beach. For twenty minutes he had fought to escape the greedy ocean, which seemed waiting to engulf him. Finally, when he was nearly drowned, an early morning stroller had rescued him.

Ever since that day the open sea had seemed a treacherous monster to him, and the most horrible nightmare he could conceive was to be a lone swimmer on its bosom. The pull of the undertow, his own utter helplessness against it, the puniness of his strength compared to the boundless power of the water—all had been burned into his consciousness, never to be erased. He would be flying twenty miles at sea, probably in a land plane that would sink in two hours . . .

But it had to be done, and that was every bit of that. If the motor failed——

"But it won't!" he told himself savagely. And he tried to lose himself in the never-failing joy of handling his ship, keeping it in its precise position in the formation by featherlike touches on throttle and stick and rudder, compensating for the vagaries of the air and the maneuvers of the ship ahead.

A moment later he forgot himself and the prospect ahead, as Verona came in sight. George Fra-

mer, looking like an owl in his leather helmet and goggles, was leaning over the side, peering ahead. Russ had no opportunity for that, but five minutes later, as the formation went into single file and started spiraling down over the stark desolation a half-mile below them, he had a chance to observe it.

As far as his eyes could see the Gulf was dotted with débris—bodies, planks, clothing. The beach was lined with piled wreckage. The waters of the Gulf were muddy and opaque, indescribably filthy. But it was Verona itself that seemed the last word in horror.

Like so many beach cities, the business section was located practically on a level with the water. It was perhaps a half-mile square, and had boasted several high buildings and well-built blocks. It had born the brunt of the huge tidal wave, and now it was literally nothing but a colossal heap of wreckage. Streets were choked with overturned automobiles, the contents of the gutted stores, and the remains of buildings which had toppled from their foundations. There was not a single open thoroughfare. The residential section was on top of a terrace which swept upward from the business blocks, and the many bungalows had partly escaped the force of the water.

The beach, however, for a mile on either side of town, had been lined with boatclubs, dancing pavilions, amusement parks, and bungalows. Without exception, these had been totally destroyed.

Whole houses had been picked bodily from their moorings, and thrown on end many feet away from their original foundations. Boats, some of them fair-sized ferries and pleasure craft, were splintered on the beach. Dead bodies—animals and human beings—lay everywhere.

A half-mile back of town there were twelve ships on a long, narrow field, one end of which was a pool of shallow water. In the middle of the pool was the ruins of a barn, and the carcasses of several cows and horses were scattered about. The Donovan Field ships had arrived early, evidently, and whoever was in command had found a landing field. The Donovan ships were Jennys—a training type which is slower and less powerful than a DeHaviland, and consequently safer to fly under such conditions as faced the airmen here.

Russ noticed that there were dozens of men swarming around the ships, and a half-mile away several trucks were toiling toward the field with what looked like gas-cans in them. Evidently there was no time being lost.

One by one the border ships shot across the boundary fence, and stalled to the mushy ground. Every one of them made it, although Jimmy Jennings, just ahead of Russ, nearly nosed over. Farrell took a careful shot at the field, dropping his big bomber above the fence by inches. He was stalling in as slowly as possible, and to make assurance doubly sure Framer unstrapped his belt, and at the

second of landing slid back down the fuselage to help keep the tail down. The propeller cleared the ground by only a few inches, and a slight nose-up would have put their ship out of commission.

Russ taxied to the fence, and with George superintending willing civilian helpers on the wings succeeded in turning his ship into the line facing the fence. Already Captain Kennard was in conference with a lieutenant-colonel who was evidently from Donovan Field. Russ turned off the gas, ran the motor out, snapped off the two switches, and climbed out. The terrible stench of rotting flesh hung like a solid substance in the air, and for a moment he felt nauseated. Then he and George strolled over and greeted the Donovan Field men. Ridgeway, his old cadet instructor, was there, long and lean and sardonic as ever. He greeted his old student with a casual:

"'Lo, Russ. Never thought you were learning to fly for a thing like this, did you?"

"I didn't think anything in those days," grinned Farrell.

Surrounding the khaki-clad flyers was a large group of civilians, all armed with Colts. They were gaunt and hollow-eyed, and the tragedy through which they were passing had already left an imprint on their strained faces. Not a man but had lost either one of his family, or had his fortune swept away, or both.

The contrast between the flyers and the civilians

was marked. The Verona men were dirty, unshaven, with drawn faces and hopeless eyes. The flyers, trimly clad from boots to helmets, were tanned and clear-eyed, and there was a subtle something in their bearing which labeled them as tarred with the same stick in fundamentals. It was a quiet confidence born of dozens of sudden emergencies faced and conquered. Men who look death in the eye on an average of at least once a month and escape by their own skill show the effects in many ways, and the cool competence and assurance which were obvious in their bearing seemed to have its effect on the tortured people whom they were there to help.

Russ, at twenty-one, after three years of flying, was a different man from the eager, freckle-faced youngster of eighteen whom Ridgeway had known as a cadet three years before. He had filled out a trifle—his shoulders were broader and the tan of the border was deep in his skin. His blue eyes had sun-crinkles around them, and in them was the look born of sweeping far horizons from a lofty perch a mile or more above the earth. Ridgeway, who had helped Russ fight the hardest battles of his flying career, smiled his one-sided smile, and there was a glint in his narrow gray eyes as he remarked:

"They nearly got you back there at Donovan, I remember. You sure fought yourself and Flags Gadley and everything else plenty. Found the game worth the candle, Russ? Seems to me——"

"Hello there, Ridge!" interrupted a loud voice, and Ridgeway turned to greet a tall chap of about thirty with a square face and a thin mouth which was now stretched in a grin. His nose had been broken, and strengthened the impression of hard recklessness which was the outstanding characteristic of the stranger's face.

"Hello, Young," said Ridgeway coolly. "This is Farrell. Young was once a flyer at Donovan," he explained. "He's been out since the armistice."

"This is a devil of a note, isn't it?" said the newcomer, as though talking about something which was rather humorous. "By the way, ever run across Huntley? Saw him not long ago——"

Farrell turned away, and his eye fell on a small man who was sitting on a fence a few feet away. The other flyers were engaged in conversation with various civilians, waiting for Kennard and the Colonel to finish their conference and give orders.

The man's thin, lined face held an expression of utter hopelessness. He looked as though he was dead on his feet as he sat there, shoulders slumping and sunken eyes staring into the distance. Suddenly, as though aware of Farrell's pitying gaze, his eyes met the flyer's and he smiled a wintry little smile.

"We're glad to see you boys," he said, pushing his felt hat farther back on his head.

"Aw, quit looking like a lost soul, Bailey!" came Young's loud voice. "Buck up!"

There was something offensive in the ex-pilot's loud words, and the little man flushed dully.

"Maybe you wouldn't be handing around so much free advice if you weren't as well off personally as you ever were," he snapped.

"Wouldn't that make you laugh?" inquired Young. "Bailey here had a little two-by-four jewelry store. It's gone, but his wife was down near the center of town and got out with only a broken ankle and a fractured arm."

"It strikes me that how Bailey feels is his own business, and that the rest of us had better butt out!" Russ said in level tones. "Who asked your advice about how Bailey ought to feel, Young?"

Something in the man's attitude had rubbed Russ the wrong way, and his impulsive words had been the result. Young's cold green eyes met Farrell's steadily, and a grin widened his thin, gashlike mouth.

"I remember you—one of Fred's cadets. Some boy now, eh? Bars on and everything—border patrolman. Well, who asked you to do any butting in yourself, youngster?"

Ridgeway, cool and observant, inserted himself into the strained situation.

"You're talking out of your turn, Young."

The hard-looking, devil-may-care Young gestured widely.

"Weeping and wailing don't do any good, and it makes me sick!" he said contemptuously.

"What did you lose—anything?" demanded Russ.

Young got on his nerves, somehow, and he had instinctively liked the little jeweler.

"Never having been fool enough to collect a family, and possessing an incurable dislike for work, I had nothing to lose," said Young with satisfaction. He seemed to consider the disaster which had killed hundreds and ruined thousands as a show to give him a thrill.

"Just where do you sit on the thing, Bailey?" Young went on, dislike apparent in his face as he turned to the jeweler. "Lost that little stock of five-and-ten-cent jewelry——"

Bailey, evidently trying to control his temper, said slowly:

"Everything of great value—thirty thousand dollars' worth—was in the safe, with some money. If the safe went flooey, I'm ruined financially, but I can't believe it did. As for my wife, she's been sick, as you know, and while a broken leg doesn't mean much ordinarily, she may not live, Frank. The next day or two will tell the tale."

Young swept aside the reference to Bailey's wife, and made some inquiries about the safe.

"You don't mean that funny little box you had, do you?" he asked. "Why don't you get a real safe, and then you'd be sure things were all right."

Bailey's taut nerves snapped.

"None of your business!" he snarled, and there was a murderous flare in his unhealthily bright eyes.

Young lost none of his *savoir-faire.* He grinned, gestured mutely, and swaggered off.

"Some friend you've got, Fred," Russ told Ridgeway, and the flyer grinned his sardonic grin.

"His bark's worse than his bite, I guess," he observed. "Good flyer at one time, but inclined to talk too much about it."

"I'm sorry that he gets on my nerves so much," Bailey apologized. He had slumped again, as though unutterably fatigued. "He wanted to marry Sally, my wife, pretty badly, and ever since I beat him to it he's sort of had it in for me. Gets under my skin, sometimes, particularly now."

"What's his business nowadays?" Russ asked casually.

"Hasn't any. His mother left him some money when she died two years ago, and he's been cutting a wide swath down here. I've heard that his dough is about gone, though. He gambles a lot, and parties are his principal occupation. By the way, Lieutenant Farrell, I'd be glad if you'd stay with us while you're here. You men are to be billeted, and I've already offered to take one."

"But your wife——"

"My sister is caring for her, and it will make no difference."

"I should think you'd be investigating your store, and would want to stay at home for a while," remarked Ridgeway.

"To prevent looting, the whole business section is

quarantined. I couldn't do any good at home, and they need us all, I guess."

Something in the unassuming words of the little Verona man, and the utter simplicity of his devotion to duty, impressed Farrell profoundly. Before he could say a word he heard Captain Kennard's shout:

"Gentlemen! Everybody up here."

The Colonel began talking without preamble:

"Verona is under martial law. I am in command. Four DeHavilands which will arrive soon from Laredo will keep up a ferry service between here and San Antone, carrying vitally needed medicine and supplies and giving information to the relief trains which will come through as soon as the tracks can be rebuilt. The other ships will patrol all over the Gulf, dropping food and water to survivors by means of floating bags which will be ready at four this afternoon. You will make detailed reports of all survivors noted. There is but one serviceable rowboat, which will be used to pick up the most desperate cases. You will each be assigned sectors.

"After flying hours you will be divided into two sections. You will act as officers of the day, one section from six to twelve midnight and the other from midnight to six A. M., having under you a section of the city and eight civilian guards to prevent looting. Orders are to shoot all looters at sight. You will eat at the First Baptist church, headquarters of the relief committee, and will be

billeted in various houses. Captain Kennard is in charge of all of you and the flying operations.

"Gas is on the way, and oil. See that your ships are ready for a patrol at four this afternoon, then eat, then come back. All serviceable cars are commandeered. These civilians here will help with gassing the ships, then be released for guard duty. That's all—see Captain Kennard for your assignments."

Russ found that his flying sector lay straight out over the Gulf for ten miles, and was ten miles wide. He was given landmarks to fly by, as the shore would be visible. He found it easy to arrange to be billeted with Bailey. After gassing the ships, they were carried to town, and joined the long breadline at the church, where wan women, who seemed ready to drop in their tracks, portioned out sandwiches and coffee.

At four o'clock the food and water bags were ready, and he made his patrol. He and George Framer found three survivors, one clinging to a plank and the others on extemporized rafts. The two-hour patrol was one long continuous strain, and it took every bit of grim resolution in him to bring his ship down to the surface of the water, and then bank steeply directly over the target so that George could drop the food accurately.

Once they sighted three sharks, their fins out of water.

When Russ landed he was shaking like a leaf, and

yet it was characteristic of him that never for an instant did he contemplate any effort to get a land patrol. To-morrow there was at least six hours of steady flying over the water to look forward to—and the motor might fail. But the spirit of the flying clan was deep in Russ Farrell, and even if he could not sleep back at Bailey's home he did not falter.

At midnight he was at the town hall, which was headquarters, and received his assignment. His post was a square consisting of two blocks on a side, right in the center of the shambles which was the business district. And his detachment of eight men included Bailey and Young.

He marched them a few yards away from the other detachments and gave brief instructions. "Challenge twice—and then shoot!" Those were the orders. Guards were to patrol constantly, and keep a tight cordon around the four blocks with which the detachment was charged.

As soon as Russ had finished Young detached himself from the little knot of men and walked up to him.

"I'm sorry I made a fool of myself this morning, Farrell," he said in a low tone. "To tell the truth, I'd been drinking to keep myself going. I've been in the army, and I'll be glad to help you out. Make an inspection or two for you, if you like. You're tired, and will need rest."

"That's all right, Young. Thanks," replies Russ

briefly. The man was rather likable when he talked like that—and yet Russ could not forget his callousness that morning. The more so because of the few hours he had spent in Bailey's shadowed home, with the invalid fighting for her life behind closed doors and her husband making a pitiful pretence of optimism.

"Little Bailey there is dead on his feet, and no wonder," Young went on softly. The devil-may-care recklessness discernible in his face was still there, but there was a marked change in his attitude, even extending to his voice. "I'd be glad to sort of make amends by taking the post next to him and maybe saving him some walking by helping him out. What say?"

Russ hesitated momentarily. Bailey ought to be home right that minute——

"That's nice of you, Young—I'll put you together. The poor devil might fall asleep, at that."

Which arrangement he carried out in posting his men along the foul, clogged streets that enclosed the vast shambles they were to guard. Débris of every description made the streets so nearly impassable that it was necessary to climb over obstacles every few feet.

"My store was in the middle of this square," Bailey told him. "After we go off duty, would you mind if I took a minute to see whether I can find anything?"

"Sure!" agreed Russ heartily. Even owners were

not allowed to do any poking around in the ruins as yet, but under the circumstances, and with himself along, he felt that he would not be exceeding his authority if he marched the guard past Bailey's store at the end of their tour. He could not forget the picture of frail little Mrs. Bailey encouraging her husband when she herself was so weak she could scarcely whisper, and anything he could do to relieve the Verona man's mind seemed excusable.

The night dragged along slowly. It was black as pitch, and the terrible stench which hung in the air was sickening. He barked his shins a hundred times as he picked his way around on inspections. He had a flashlight, but it did not help much. He walked around and around his sector continuously, to keep himself from falling asleep. He was almost tempted to accept Young's offer, but it would be strictly against all regulations, so he steeled himself to remain at his post.

It was shortly after four in the morning, and everything was quiet as the grave, when he decided to take a short rest. He was very tired. But, though he remained standing, leaning against a partially uprooted trolley pole, he found himself drifting off into slumber. So he started again.

The next post was Young's. He walked along the full block, but could see nothing of the ex-flyer. He raised his voice sharply:

"Young!"

As he called, some instinctive sixth sense warned

him. Without knowing why he did so, he started to dodge. The next second a terrific blow from behind felled him like an ox under the butcher's axe.

For an instant he fought for consciousness. He lay there, motionless, while shooting stars whirled dizzily through his brain. Through a haze of pain his slightly opened eyes beheld a vague form leaning over him—and though it might have been a nightmare, it seemed to him that it was Young, with a club in his hand.

The shock of the recognition, if recognition it was, helped him to struggle upward through what seemed like illimitable, never-ending darkness. Then he realized that the man, whose face he could not see now, was raising the club again, as though to hit him and make sure that he was dead to the world. There was a terrible moment when he expected the blow to fall, but he forced himself to hold his breath and lie as motionless as a corpse.

When softly thudding footsteps told him that the man was fleeing, he forced himself to sit up. For a full moment he was incapable of movement, for his head would not clear. But through the nausea and dizziness which gripped him a possible solution of what had happened came to his mind. Young disliked Bailey—Bailey had said that the reckless ex-flyer was about at the end of his financial rope—Young knew about Bailey's valuables, and the location of the store—he had asked to be put next to Bailey on post——

He forced himself to his feet, and went stumbling toward the next block, where Bailey should be. Halfway down it he rounded a heap of soaked clothing which had been swept from a store, and fell over a body. His flashlight told him it was Bailey.

He shot off his gun, and yelled for help. Running footsteps and shouts answered him as the two nearest guards came running.

"Take care of Bailey!" he shouted, and made off at a lumbering run toward headquarters, five blocks away.

As he ran, falling frequently and bumping into obstacles which he scarcely noticed, the explanation of what had happened seemed entirely clear to him. Young had forced the safe combination from Bailey, and then knocked him unconscious. He had robbed the safe, leaving his post, and had lain in wait for Russ himself. He must have got the jewels and money, or he would not have assaulted him—Farrell.

And Young was an ex-flyer. It would have been madness for him to expect to get away with the crime in a city where escape was impossible and where Bailey, at least, could undoubtedly testify definitely against him—except by air. Young must be planning to steal a ship and fly the comparatively few miles to Mexico.

He threw the password to the guard on the next sector, and stopped long enough to gasp the outlines of his story to Sleepy Spears, in charge.

"Go to it, Russ—I'd give a leg to be with you!" Spears told him gently. "He passed here on the run and said you had sent him. I heard a car start a minute ago. He must have stolen one of the cars from headquarters."

Farrell's head was aching terrifically, but he ran the remaining blocks to headquarters. He leaped into one of the cars which had been commandeered and were awaiting emergencies, just as Captain Kennard came out of the door of the big building.

A few sentences apprized the Captain of what Russ suspected.

"Hop to it and I'll be right behind you with help!" rasped the stocky little C. O., and the next minute Russ was hurling the powerful car down the shadowed, quiet street.

The road on which he turned to get to the field was rough and muddy, but he did not slacken speed. With his eyes glued to the road he sent the car over the bumps at fifty miles an hour. Young had five minutes' start on him—perhaps he could catch him before he took off.

Then a sickening thought smote him. If Young had a confederate, and the ship was already started when he got there, he would not only be in the air, but possibly would have instructed his partner in crime to put all the other ships out of commission. It could be done easily—merely kicking through the frail linen of an elevator, say, or a wing. But Young would scarcely do that, he figured—he would

count on getting a clean start of at least half an hour —and Mexico and safety were not far away.

As the car roared up to the field he heard the noise of a motor, and the next second the red flame of the exhaust was visible, leaving trailers of fire as the ship took off. Young had had a confederate. But Farrell's heart leaped exultingly as his trained ear told him that Young had taken a Jenny and not a DeHaviland. Probably because of his long absence from flying he had played it safe and taken one of the smaller planes, which are easier to fly.

Russ did not even turn off the automobile motor, but flung himself over the fence and ran to the DeHaviland on the end of the line. The other ship was roaring away across the town, bound for the Gulf and Mexico. The exhaust made it easily visible.

A thirty-second inspection with his flashlight showed nothing wrong that he could see, although there was no telling about the motor. He spun the big propeller fiercely, then primed the motor, spun the propeller again, and clicked on the starting switches. If the self-starter would only work quickly——

It did. The night was warm, and the motor not too cold. The next second, as the four-hundred-and-fifty horsepower Liberty idled along gently, he was in the cockpit. Luckily he carried his goggles in his pocket, for the last shift on the O. D. job was to report for flying as soon as its tour of duty

was over. He strapped the belt, advanced the spark, and taxied out on the field. He swept the ship around close to the fence, took a last look at the red pin-pricks far off in the sky, and pushed the throttle all the way ahead.

In all his flying career he had never taken a more desperate chance. To take off in the darkness, with a motor which had not been warmed up and which must run perfectly at full speed to save him from disaster, was a deliberate flouting of all the flyers' gods. But the great bomber left the ground a few feet from the vague bulk of the ruined barn, and the Liberty—that masterpiece of motor building to which the greatest engineers of the country contributed their most cherished secrets—hummed along without one of its twelve mighty cylinders missing a beat.

The Jenny was flying low—undoubtedly with the object of wasting neither time nor speed in climbing. But ninety miles an hour was the best it could do—and the airspeedmeter on the D. H. was registering a hundred and twenty.

A hundred feet below the slimy waters of the Gulf seemed silver in the gray light of the breaking dawn. Soon the foul effluvia of the storm was discernible on its surface, and the Jenny loomed black against the lightening southern sky. Russ swept his instruments with his eyes, and was relieved to find that the oil pressure was rising, as was the temperature. He had forgotten that the water was underneath

him, and that he was flying with a cold motor. As he realized it now, he was aware that he was not afraid. The greater thing had triumphed over his own old obsession, and even through the grim determination which filled him he was exultantly conscious of his sudden victory over himself. Nothing mattered but getting Bailey his jewels, now, and the water was only an ordinary hazard of flying.

With his more powerful craft, he could play round the Jenny in the air, and he decided to attempt to do some aerial herding. As he caught up with the other ship, and throttled close beside it, he could see two men in it. Young was in the front seat, and as he looked around he actually waved to Russ. Terrible as the man's crimes had been, Russ could not but admit to a sneaking admiration for the careless impudence of the hard-bitten young scoundrel.

He patted his machine guns, and motioned back toward land. The Jenny did not falter, however, but kept drumming along over the water. For a moment Russ was nonplussed, and then his mind grasped the explanation. Young knew that death was the penalty for his crime, under the circumstances—why should he turn back, even under the threat of the guns?

Farrell knew that he could dive on the Jenny, and with one burst of bullets send the ship and its passengers, dead, into the Gulf. And yet he shrank from that. And, though it seemed like an im-

possibility, there might be some circumstance which would save them from death back at Verona.

He made up his mind quickly. He would force their ship lower, until a fall into the water would not kill them. Then go back and get the boat started for them.

He dived at the ship deliberately. The airspeed jumped to nearly two hundred miles an hour. Fifty feet from his objective he had hard work to hold himself from pulling up, but he held his nerve. Which one would break soonest—he or Young?

It was Young, for he could not know what was going on in Farrell's mind. He nosed down desperately to avoid the big bomber rushing down at him. The D. H. flashed across the other ship, and Russ made a lightning turn. When he was back of the other ship again he repeated his maneuver. Again the Jenny dived to escape the ship which seemed bound to collide with it. The DeHaviland was quivering under the strain when Russ pulled it out. The Jenny was but fifty feet from the water, now, and he maneuvered for the shot. He would try to cripple the ship, and that alone. If a bullet caught one of the passengers, so be it.

He got into position three hundred feet above the Jenny, and pointed his ship downward at the tip of the right wing. He cut the motor to twelve hundred, as he drew the bead, and then his machine guns, shooting through the propeller, sprayed the target. He was almost on top of the ship when he

saw a strut splinter into pieces. Then the right wing collapsed. The Jenny spun slowly to the water, falling off into a steep slip just before it hit in a shower of spray. As the column of water fell back he could see the ship, upside down, with the motor completely submerged and the tail in the air. But no sign of the passengers.

For thirteen seconds that seemed like so many hours he waited, and then a head bobbed to the surface, followed by another. They grasped the ship, and hung on. Russ waited for them to climb up on it—it would float for two hours before the linen became watersoaked. But ten minutes passed, and they were still hanging on, without any attempt to pull themselves up. He nosed down, and shot past them with his under-carriage nearly scraping the water. Then he saw that they were practically unconscious from the fall, and unable to climb to safety. The next moment came the thought of sharks.

He cruised around, watching for the telltale fins. Fifteen minutes later another ship roared out over the Gulf. Tex MacDowell was in it, and Russ signaled as well as he could for Tex to go back and start the one rowboat to the rescue of the renegades below. Tex nodded, took in the situation, and flew the ten miles back to shore.

Russ resumed his ceaseless watch for sharks. He felt as though the sight of those cold-blooded scavengers approaching his two victims would be the most

horrible thing in the world. It never occurred to him to go back to shore and escape the chance of motor failure himself.

Then he saw one menacing fin cutting the water a quarter of a mile from the two helpless men. Three times he sent his ship down over it, and sent a shower of bullets into the beast. What became of it he never knew. It seemed as though the bullets must have found some vital point in the man-eating monster, but the fin simply disappeared, and a half-hour of taut watchfulness near the floating ship and its helpless burden brought forth no other signs of it.

For two hours he watched over the two men below while the boat, manned by three men, made its slow way toward them. It was close by before he left. He found a car waiting at the field, and most of the flyers were already there. Tex had told them what he had found; so brief explanations were all that were necessary. When the boat landed, Farrell was on the beach, with the Colonel and Captain Kennard and Bailey, whose head was bandaged.

"We got the swag—it was on Young and he said it was all there," yelled Jimmy Jennings, who was in the boat, and Bailey slumped weakly.

"I guess—— I can never thank you, Farrell," he said slowly.

"Then don't try," smiled Russ, his eyes on Young

The ex-flyer smiled briefly as he got out of the boat, under the muzzles of three guns.

"I'll be shot, I presume?" he inquired, swaying a bit. He had a nasty gash in his head, and his partner was unconscious.

"Absolutely, on Bailey's testimony," snapped the Colonel.

"Then get it over!" snarled Young, and jumped straight for the three civilian guards who were waiting, guns in hand.

Russ leaped forward, and helped subdue the tiger-like criminal.

"Why didn't you shoot, you poor prunes!" raged their prisoner. "Think I'll enjoy waiting?"

But he was not shot, eventually. Court was held a half-hour later, and Bailey pleaded so hard for clemency that the Colonel relented and held Young for a civil court after martial law should be done away with in Verona. It was a certainty that Young and his accomplice would have plenty of years in jail to think matters over.

After the brief trial was concluded Captain Kennard's scarred face was split by a grin as he surveyed his youngest flyer.

"Nice work, Russ," he said. "Gallop up to the church, get a sandwich and some coffee, and beat it to the field. You'll be late."

"Yes, sir."

Bailey joined him on the walk to food headquarters.

"Now don't start thanking me again," grinned Russ. "How is Mrs. Bailey?"

"Fine, Russ! When the doctor was there for me she was asleep, and the fever had left her, he said. The danger is over, thank God!"

He stopped as Russ turned into the church.

"It may not be exactly right to be happy right now in Verona, but——"

The jeweler stopped as his eyes met Farrell's. They shook hands, and there was suspicious moisture in Bailey's eyes. Then Russ ran up the walk to the church. There was a lot of work ahead.

COMING ACROSS

RUSS, hunched down comfortably behind the windshield which separated his twelve-cylinder Liberty motor from the cockpit of his DeHaviland plane, opened the throttle wide. He was sixty miles from home—home still being the McMullen airdrome of the border patrol—and he had just about a half-hour to get there. Darkness falls quickly down on the Mexican border. He was a mile and a half high, flying almost directly above the twisting Rio Grande. Southward stretched the limitless mesquite-covered fastnesses of Mexico, and northward a few miles of open fields, interspersed with clumps of chaparral, merged into a solid mass of the gray-green growth.

He was alone on the return patrol to McMullen, for George Framer, his observer, had received permission to drop off at Laredo, the next airdrome west of McMullen, to attend a dance that night. Russ himself had never cared enough about tripping the light fantastic toe to become a very expert foot-flinger, or to be light on his partner's feet.

As he automatically listened to the rhythmic roar of his motor, he was scrutinizing the ground closely. Not for an instant did he relax his vigilance; trouble was likely to be sneaking along the border.

A wave of criminal activity—rum running, dope smuggling, cattle rustling, and bandit activities had kept the newspapers well supplied with headlines. And Lieutenant Russ Farrell took it to heart, as though he personally were responsible. For his pride in the outfit to which he belonged knew no bounds, even though he didn't talk about it. Every time he thought of the hundred picked flyers who day after day patroled the stormy border country from coast to coast—twentieth-century rangers who rode airplanes instead of horses—he was aware of a deep, inarticulate pride that he should have been selected as one of them. The glorious record of the patrol—a record that had cost the life of one man out of eight each year—was a matter of personal satisfaction to him, and he gloried in every element that helped make up the eventful, dangerous existence of a border flyer.

They had been working night and day, almost since their return from Verona—and yet fifteen hundred miles of wilderness cannot be plugged tight by a hundred flyers, a few hundred soldiers, and occasional customs men and rangers. One cannot dam a river with a row of stakes ten feet apart. Somehow Russ felt as though the recent crime wave reflected unjustly on the patrol, and on himself personally.

So he watched the ground every second, even though he knew in his heart that it would be sheer accident if a suspicious caravan or a south-bound herd of cattle was sighted in the afternoon.

He had passed a little settlement, ten miles back, and there was no other in sight ahead. There were isolated shacks, belonging to Mexicans, dotting ragged cotton-fields, and on the river bank there was a small collection of them which might be dignified with the title of village. It was not noted on his map, he discovered.

There were a few people, looking like ants from his great height, discernible around the little group of shacks. He was watching them idly, wondering what life must be like in a little place so far from civilization, when his eyes darted suddenly to the instrument board in front of him. There had come a break in the rhythmic roar of the Liberty, and that always means peril ahead for the flyer.

The tachometer needle dropped to thirteen hundred revolutions a minute, and the oil pressure went down to fifteen pounds. Three or four cylinders were missing. The big motor sputtered, hesitated, and backfired. It fired raggedly, and heavy smoke was visible coming from the exhaust pipes.

He already knew the best field for a forced landing —no flyer worthy of the name neglects to have one marked at all times, if there is one. There seldom is on the border, but right then he was above a large cotton-field.

He nosed down automatically to keep flying speed, and tried his best to get the motor working correctly by jazzing the throttle and adjusting the altitude lever once more. But it got worse

instead of better. Then he noticed that his glasses were fogged with oil to a far greater extent than usual, and that the side of the cowling was spotted with it. The Liberty was pumping oil, and undoubtedly the distributor heads which relayed the spark to the spark plugs had become fouled.

There was nothing to do but land, and that meant spending the night down below among those Mexicans instead of with the gang back at McMullen. It likewise meant sleeping by his ship, for one cannot leave a DeHaviland unguarded on the border; too many outlaws hate the patrol. All in all, it was an unpleasant prospect, and the big pilot was far from pleased as he spiraled earthward.

He cut the throttle gradually as he came lower, to prevent it from cooling too fast. The field presented no difficulties—there was not even a fence as an obstacle on the eastern end. It was fully four hundred yards long, and the furrows did not appear to be deep.

As he got down to fifteen hundred feet he noticed that there was wild excitement among the people below him. There were fully a dozen of them, and they were streaming out of the makeshift street and running to make sure they saw the landing.

With judgment of speed and distance which was instinctive he had the DeHaviland straightened for the field five hundred yards east of it and a hundred feet high. With the crippled motor to help him when necessary, he sent the ship scudding along over

a large clump of mesquite a hundred yards east of the field, and then cut it. In a flat glide the De-Haviland flashed downward at ninety miles an hour. It slowed and wavered a trifle a few yards back from the ditch which bounded the field on that side. A last burst of the motor, which caused a loud backfire, propelled the ton-and-a-half ship over the cut. Russ brought it to earth within fifteen feet of the edge, and in the soft ground it rolled less than fifty yards.

He wasted none of the few remaining moments of daylight, but quickly snapped off the distributor heads on the end of each bank of cylinders. They were badly fouled—contact points and segments alike. He was cleaning the second one when the Mexicans arrived—on horseback. They hung on the outskirts of the field, coming no closer, and it was as plain as day that they were very, very ill at ease.

Russ wondered where a full dozen horses had appeared from. He had seen none from the air, and he had scrutinized the terrain very carefully. And why should a group of red-kerchiefed, booted Mexicans hang off in the distance, instead of crowding around the plane? Almost invariably one had to fight off curious onlookers; they wanted to climb all over a ship. But these seemed afraid of him—worried, nervous, at a loss.

That queer sixth sense which is developed among men whose existence is a battle with primitive things sent a warning tingling through the young flyer, and there was a pleasurable excitement generated in him

as the unusual nature of the Mexicans' actions became more and more obvious. The border patrol would naturally awe them—it always had. But unless they had some reason to be frightened, why should they act as they did? His swiftly working mind reached one conclusion instantly. They thought that he had landed on purpose. It was not far-fetched to figure that if they were afraid he had dropped in intentionally, they had something to hide.

"Won't do any harm to snoop about a bit!" he told himself as he put the last distributor head back.

He climbed off the motor, and started walking toward them. Already the red sun had dropped behind the western horizon, and in a few minutes the purple blanket of the night would descend with startling suddenness.

Their low, liquid tones lapsed into silence as he came closer. They sat their horses without movement and every eye was on him. In their high-pointed straw sombreros and gaudy neckerchiefs they gave life to a vista wherein it seemed that nothing was too bizarre to be possible—even probable.

"What is the name of your town?" enquired Russ, his hand on his hip just above the Colt which swung in his holster.

Quick looks passed between several of them at his question. Then a disreputable-looking old fellow, with a leathery face and keen eyes below bushy eyebrows, sent his horse a step or two forward. He

smiled ingratiatingly, showing wonderfully even and white teeth, although his seamed face showed considerable age.

"It 'as no name, señor," he said in stilted English. "You are lieutenant—flyer?"

Farrell nodded, his eyes sweeping the company casually. They were of varying ages, dark, and most of them sported black moustaches. They were not a very propitious-looking group. The spokesman was trying to be pleasant but there was something repulsive in his silky, obsequious tones and wrinkled face. His eyes were like shoe-buttons peering forth from deep sockets.

Nearly a year on the border, during which he had come to take for granted the primitive man-to-man struggle being constantly waged along the Rio Grande, had taught Russ the art of making decisions quickly, and for good reasons. Right now he was wondering what his pose should be. Should he attempt to dominate from the start—or lull their patent suspicion? He quickly decided on the latter. If there was anything afoot, it might be easier to find it out by lulling their fears. True, the prestige of the patrol would undoubtedly be sufficient for him to stop, at that moment, any rustling or other illegal activity which might be scheduled, but that would not bring the offenders to boot. He grinned derisively at himself at the way in which he was taking things for granted. Nevertheless, there was something peculiar about the lay-out——

"I had a forced landing—motor no good," he said quietly. "I want to get something to eat, and then I'll come back and stay with the ship until morning."

In that moment his suspicions were absolutely corroborated. To a greenhorn, it might not have seemed significant that the tension in the air lessened perceptibly, nor that the Mexicans looked at one another as though relieved, and gave vent to several remarks in Spanish. The old man smiled.

"The sheep go wrong, eh? It ees fixed now?"

Russ nodded.

"I hope so," he remarked. "Is there anywhere I can get something to eat?"

"I shall be delight'—I, Manuel Harada."

"My name is Farrell," stated Russ. "I'm ready to start for town now——"

He did not finish, because of the obvious impression his name had made on his auditors.

"Señor Farrell? Who rescue Señor Gates from the bandits?"

It was Harada who asked that question, and his wrinkled old face was suddenly serious and his black eyes opaque. Russ dismissed the implied flattery in the men's attitude, and sought to find the reason for it. It was not far to seek in his estimation. The adventure of rescuing Sergeant Gates had made Farrell well known along the river—and very possibly the Mexicans considered him extremely dangerous, little knowing that he was one of the youngest patrolmen, both in years and experience.

"Yes, I'm that Farrell," nodded Russ. "Right now I'm hungry, Señor Harada."

"I ride ahead to prepare for you," stated Harada grandiloquently. He was once again the bowing and scraping underling, seeking favor. Without another word the whole cavalcade wheeled and galloped off.

It was a mile to the shacks, and just before Russ reached them he passed the horses, now hobbled and grazing. He was absolutely certain that the cowponies had not been in sight when he was in the air. They had been in some shed, doubtless—which was a peculiar place for them to be, unless the Mexicans had wanted to keep them hidden.

Harada was awaiting him, in the midst of a group which included a half-dozen children and most of the men who had ridden out to the ship. There were perhaps a dozen dwellings in the place, and women peeped at him furtively from three or four of them. At least half a dozen of the small huts were apparently unused. They were not placed with regularity along a street, but were located without rhyme or reason, facing in all directions.

An old crone served him with tortillas, beans, and coffee. Harada's labored conversation was mostly about flying and the patrol, and at least three times he found occasion to mention that Russ had landed by accident, and not design—as though desiring repeated reassurance.

Granting that there was something illegal afoot—

and with every passing moment Farrell was more sure of it—he was inclined to believe that possibly it was cattle-rustling. He was morally certain that all those men did not belong in the place, nor those horses. Possibly a half dozen of them—yes, but not all. The very hut where he was eating bore evidence of little use—the fireplace in the middle seemed not to have been used for a long time. And there was no sign of a store. It looked as though only four or five cotton planters lived there, and the other buildings had fallen into disuse.

He figured cattle-rustling because of the unusual number of horses, and yet he could think of no ranch within forty miles. Possibly they had run the cattle down the night before and had them secreted somewhere, and were taking them across that night. But he would have seen any considerable number from the air, in that case. It might be dope smuggling—and yet the presence of so many men and horses would not be necessary if that was the explanation.

By the time he had finished his meal he had decided on his course of action. He would go out to the ship, stay there awhile, and then do some scouting around to find out what was going on. It was a certainty that the presence of a border patrolman was very annoying to the Mexicans, and he was positive that there was some good reason for their attitude.

"I am ver' sorry you cannot stay, señor," Harada assured him as he prepared to leave. "You spend the night by the sheep, eh?"

"Yes. Gracias, señor."

"Gracias" and "adios" were the only Spanish words Russ knew.

The moon had not yet risen, and it was very dark. As Russ made his way between the houses he was aware of a group of men squatting on their haunches in front of one small building. They talked to each other in low voices, their cigarets glowing like fireflies in the darkness. From every window someone was peeking out at him. The atmosphere seemed subtly sinister, as though from every side the hostile eyes of enemies were peering at him. It was enough to make Russ pause—but the odds against him did not cause him to weaken. The spirit of the patrol was too deeply ingrained in him for that. It never occurred to him that he might keep out of trouble, if trouble there was to be. He was one against many, but there were no two ways about his duty under the circumstances.

He walked briskly through the velvet darkness, perfecting his plans. As he tried to leave no possible detail uncovered, a thought occurred to him.

"If they've got something on, they'll want to be absolutely sure I'm out of the way," he soliloquized, "They might send a man out to watch me, and see that I stayed close to the ship. That sounds reasonable, if I'm right, and these men are here for a purpose. Arrangements must be so definite that they won't want to stop—perhaps can't stop—what they're doing, until I get out of the way."

As a result of his estimate of their possible procedure, he did not stay by the ship, but carried the seat cushions into a thicket along the edge of the field. He lay down, and settled himself as comfortably as possible for his long vigil.

The moon rose, and flooded the world with a weird silver light that made it seem almost as light as day. For an hour he was not rewarded with any signs of life whatever. There was little cover to screen any man who might be approaching, and he felt convinced that any intruder would not escape his eyes.

It was close to nine o'clock when he thought he saw a shadow move over on the second field from the one he had used. The mesquite partially screened the man, if it was a man, for two minutes. Then he saw a form come to the edge of the chaparral, and stop, evidently reconnoitering.

The man waited for ten minutes, and then walked boldly toward the ship. Russ got his Colt ready, and watched. He saw the man prowl around the DeHaviland.

"Looking for me, and having some uncomfortable minutes," he thought to himself.

When the man was in the back of the ship Farrell got up and ran swiftly toward it. The man came into view again, and started running toward the edge of the field. To spread the news that the flyer was not with his ship, probably.

"Stop! Hands up!" yelled Russ, and shot once to give emphasis to his command.

The man stopped so suddenly that he fell. Russ came up to him as he was getting up from the ground.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" demanded the flyer.

The Mexican was tall and slender, and apparently very young. His small swarthy face bore the marks of smallpox. His dark eyes were like those of a cornered rat.

"I came to—look at the sheep," he said softly, his eyes on the ground.

Apparently, he was unarmed; so Russ put the gun back in its holster.

"You came to look at me, not at the ship," Farrell said crisply. "I know what you boys are up to down there on the river, and that you don't want me around."

The chance shot told. The Mexican drew in his breath with a queer hissing sound.

"The only way you can save your hide is to tell me all that's going on," Farrell went on incisively. "That'll save you the jail that your friends are going to find themselves in."

He was absolutely sure of himself now, and figured that the bluff of knowing a good deal more than he did was his best method of worming additional information out of his man. The Mexican was at a loss. He wet his lips with his tongue, and said nothing.

"All right—how many men are in it, and when does it come off?" demanded Farrell.

At that instant the young Spig leaped at him. A

knife, which seemed to have appeared from nowhere, gleamed in the moonlight.

Russ was taken completely by surprise. He jumped, and slipped. As he went down, the Mexican tripped over him, and fell to his knees. Russ twisted his big body like an eel, and rolled far enough away so that the Mexican could not reach him. As the man turned around and dived for him, Farrell succeeded in gripping the hand which held the knife.

For half a minute there was a silent, deadly struggle. Locked in each other's arms, they rolled and twisted over the ground. Russ knew that his only hope for life was to keep his hold on the man's wrist so that he could not use the stiletto. The Mexican fought furiously, kicking, biting, gouging as though possessed.

The pace was too strenuous to last. Farrell's breath was coming in gasps, and it seemed as though the hand with which he was holding his antagonist's wrist could stand the terrific strain no longer. He threw all his strength into one convulsive effort, and broke his opponent's hold.

As he felt the Mexican's free arm relax from around him, he raised his knees and then thrust them forward. As he did so he dared to loosen his hold, and threw his body as far as possible to one side. The next second he was on his feet.

The Mexican was halfway off the ground when Russ hit him like a ton of brick. He threw himself bodily on his antagonist, and the next instant was

kneeling on his chest, twisting the knife out of his hand. He got it, finally, and threw it into the bushes. The Mexican lay quietly, breathing hard.

Russ got up and started to draw his gun. He figured the man was through, but he was wrong. The second he was free, the Mexican leaped to his feet, and before Russ got his gun out of the holster he had to sidestep to escape a wicked blow. The next second he brought the barrel of the heavy .45 down on the outlaw's head. The man dropped like a log and lay motionless.

Russ got some safety wire from the toolkit in the ship, and bound his victim's hands and feet securely.

"There's something big up if this Spig wanted to get me out of the way as much as all that," he thought swiftly. "When he found out I knew a lot, he was willing to slip me that knife and beat it across the river. I wish he'd come to life——"

But he didn't. There was not a sign of returning consciousness in him. Russ finally decided that he had better go on a scouting trip, and make the man talk after he had returned. His place was down near the town, and the quicker he could get there the better.

It took him an hour to get to the river, a half-mile from the shacks, and prowl up the bank under cover of the shrubbery. Finally he was ensconced but a hundred yards from the shacks, well-hidden by the bushes and with a good view of the river.

For hours nothing happened. The only significant

thing was that none of the Mexicans seemed to have any idea of going to bed. A guitar sobbed and sighed through the darkness under the touch of skilful fingers, and the dozen or so men could be heard talking occasionally. A coyote howled repeatedly from the Mexican side of the river, and the rustling noises of a hundred little denizens of the night mingled with the whisper of the river.

It was three o'clock by his wrist watch when Russ saw two riders ford the river and disappear in the chaparral in Mexico. Twenty minutes later they returned, leading a ghostly cavalcade of at least twenty men on horseback. The whole party forded the river, and Russ overheard gruff conversation in a foreign language that was not Spanish. He finally decided it was Italian.

He was completely puzzled. Just what could the mysterious group of riders mean, appearing from the mesquite at three o'clock in the morning?

Ten minutes later, while Russ was still puzzling over what to do, he saw two riders recross the river to Mexico, each leading a string of horses.

Russ made his way with infinite caution toward the shacks. He crawled the last fifty yards with painful slowness, wriggling through the undergrowth like a snake. Finally he was within earshot of the group which included all the Mexicans and the probable Italians. He was screened by the river bank—they were standing a few yards back, and above him.

He could not quite catch the drift of their excited

conversation, however. He did discover that two men were doing all the talking—in English. One was Harada, and the other spoke with an unmistakable Italian accent. Finally Harada raised his voice slightly.

"We leave to-night, señors. It weel be best," he said with finality.

Leave for where? Russ wondered. Probably his own presence was responsible for the hurried departure.

Smuggling in Chinese, who were barred from the United States, long had been an industry which flourished in a small way. That he knew, of course. And here, he decided, was something similar. Congress, he recalled, had passed a new immigration law restricting to a great extent the number of foreigners allowed to enter the States each year. Probably there were untold thousands of aliens who would gladly pay high prices for an opportunity to live in the prosperous United States rather than their own war-torn, poverty-stricken countries. Doubtless these twenty Italians were to be escorted into San Antonio, they and their escort making the two-hundred-and-fifty mile trek on horseback through the mesquite. Russ knew that the price for smuggling in one of the Chinese was at least one thousand dollars. It would probably be as great for an Italian. No wonder that a twenty-thousand-dollar delivery caused the Mexicans to gamble strongly even against the patrol. That would explain the

horses, the number of men, the desperate fight of his captive back there by the ship.

Russ felt sure that his life depended on his making no noise as he crawled back down the river bank, but his mind brushed that thought aside to busy itself with possible plans. It would be suicide to walk in with a gun and try to capture them all. There was no way to telephone for help, and a few hours' delay would mean that the party would be scattered through the mesquite. Rounding them up would be a tremendously difficult task.

By the time Russ had put a safe distance between himself and the outlaws, he had decided on the only possible method of circumventing the thirty or more men whom he must capture. It was a desperate plan, in many ways, but the emergency made it necessary.

He ran quickly across the quiet, moonlit fields, covering the ground with a long stride that ate up the distance. As he arrived at the ship, looming hugely in the half-light, he stooped over his captive, and grinned exultantly as he saw that the Mexican had regained consciousness. Then he got to work on the ship—spinning the propeller, priming the cylinders, and finally working the booster-magneto which acted as a self-starter. After ten minutes' work the big Liberty burst into life, and idled along without a miss. Russ set the throttle so the tachometer was registering five hundred revolutions, and then left it while he unbound the young Mexican.

"Listen!" he commanded, gun in hand. "I know what's going on. Twenty smuggled foreigners are just about to start north. I'm going up now—and if a single man tries to cross back over the river, or to leave the area bounded by those buildings, I use my guns from the air and kill every man. Sabe? You go now and tell them—if they move, they're dead!"

Over and over again he impressed the message on the thoroughly cowed Mexican. The whole border knew what terrible execution a machine gun could do from the air, and every line of the swart captive's pock-marked face showed his comprehension—and fear.

"Go ahead—I'll give you time to get there!" commanded Russ, and the next moment his prisoner was off at a lumbering run.

In five minutes the Liberty was warm—oil pressure was correct and the twelve cylinders fired evenly on either switch. Russ climbed in the front seat and gave the D. H. the gun.

It took the air smoothly under his skilful hand, and as he turned toward the settlement, he kept the ship in a steep climb. The DeHaviland was a vague monster roaring above a world of ethereal beauty, where the moonlight gilded or the shadows hid everything that was ugly. The night air was as smooth as glass, and, as always, made the motor work better than usual.

Russ did not wait to act. He could see the large group of men down below, and even from five hun-

dred feet above, the fact that they were panic-stricken was obvious. He could see someone in the center of the group, gesticulating. That was probably his messenger. He nosed down, pointed at the river, and pressed the machine gun control. The tranquil water, like gleaming quicksilver, sent up little spurts as the bullets tore through it. Russ banked quickly, and shot again on the eastern edge of the town, then again on the north, and the west. It was a carefully calculated demonstration of his power.

It was, he figured, but an hour and a half to dawn. And the most desperate portion of his duty was just ahead of him. He must get back to the rear seat so that he could work the radio key.

He sent his ship to a thousand feet, watching the huddled group below. They were making no break for Mexico and safety—yet. He took his hand from the stick to test his ship, and for fifteen seconds, due to the marvelously accurate rigging of border mechanics plus the smooth night air, the ship drove along level without a guiding hand. Then it fell off to the right as Russ caught it. "Right wing heavy a trifle," he told himself. Nevertheless, he unstrapped his belt, and reached backward with one hand to grip the scarf-mount around the rear cockpit, holding the stick with his other hand. A last look told him that his opponents were making no move, although the horses were waiting, saddled and ready.

He took his hand from the stick, turned quickly,

and threw himself across the cowling between the cockpits. As his other hand found a grip on the scarf-mount, to help pull him over, the DeHaviland started falling off to the right.

As he was pulling himself over the giant bomber made a sickening swoop to the right, and the next second was whirling earthward in a tailspin. With the Liberty's roar swelling into din that seemed to shake the universe the ton-and-a-half ship screwed downward, nose-on. Only the grip of his two hands held Russ to the uncontrollable ship that flung him about viciously, like some prehistoric monster striving to shake off an enemy. He clawed his way into the cockpit, his arms almost cracking under the strain. The wires were screaming with the terrific speed, and the ship was shaking itself to pieces. As he fought to keep his body from leaving the plane he tried desperately to get into position to control it. Finally, when it seemed that the drunkenly whirling earth was literally reaching up to smash him, he got his hand on the stick. He thrust it forward, and twisted his body until he got his feet on the rudder. As he pulled back gradually, it seemed that the elevators in the rear must snap off under the strain, for he could barely move them against the blast of the air. Finally, less than a hundred feet above the ground, the D. H. came level—conquered.

Before strapping his belt he looked down, and saw that the men below had not made a move. Their

faces were turned wonderingly to the sky. Russ strapped his belt, unreeled the wireless antenna, and started tapping off his message to McMullen. A sergeant slept in the radio shack, and the buzz of the instrument should awaken him. Over and over again, without the aid of written words, working laboriously to be perfectly accurate against the roar of the motor, Russ sent the message:

"Send ships at dawn fifty miles west on bank of river. Smuggling. Am holding them from the air. Farrell."

The ship droned around the town in sweeping circles as he operated his key. Then, abruptly, he saw his herd of outlaws throw themselves on their horses.

Without a second's delay he unstrapped his belt and threw himself forward to get into the front cockpit, and at the guns. His body fell too far, and his head crashed into the floating compass projecting from the instrument board. He was half-stunned, but it was much easier making a forward change, and this time, dizzy as he was, he caught his ship before it had more than started to fall off. As he sent it into a steep dive toward the river, he was strapping his belt, and forcing his head to clear by sheer will power.

Then he flew down the river as the galloping mob below reached the bank on their dash for Mexico. The guns opened up, and raked the magic water with withering fire that made the outlaws pull their horses back on their haunches. He held his fire as he

turned and flew back. But they had seen enough of that hail of death which they must go through—without suitable umbrellas. They rode back to the place where they had been foregathering, and got off their horses.

Then the ceaseless watchful round started again. His head was aching badly, and the roar of the Liberty did not soothe it. He was sick and weak, and very tired. Every once in so often the motor cut out; and as time went on and the oil fouled the plugs more and more the spasmodic misfiring increased. By every rule of careful flying he should land before the oil-pumping motor became disabled once more—but he must hold them until help came.

Dawn was graying the east when the popping and spitting motor had not power enough left to keep the ship in the air. He was forced to dive slightly with the motor wide open to keep flying speed. He could keep up only three minutes longer, at the outside, and then must crack up, for he had no field within gliding distance if he kept watching the river—and perhaps McMullen had not got his message at all.

Then three specks in the eastern sky danced before his aching eyes. Jockeying his ship to save every bit of altitude, he tried to clear his tortured head to see better. There were—five of them, flying close to the ground and coming like wildfire!

He was two hundred feet high, and the motor was laboring on about half its cylinders. But he must wait until the others got there, crash or no crash.

His undercarriage was sweeping the river when they arrived. He knew that his message, plus what they could see, would be enough for them to go on. He saw three of them start down to land, and the other two take up his aerial patrol.

He had waited too long, making sure that they had the situation in hand. Before he had time to pull the nose of the ship up to stall into the river, the wheels dipped into the water. Like a flash the tail of the great ship raced through the air, due to the sudden drag of the water, and crashed upside down into the shallow Rio Grande.

The cool water cleared Farrell's head. He was strapped in, head-down under water, hemmed in by wires and fuselage. He must hold his breath, pull himself out of the cockpit, crawl out and get to the surface.

After nearly a minute of frantic work he fought free and emerged to the surface with bursting lungs. He crawled up on the fuselage, and perched himself on a wing, watching the roundup on the shore. The ships in the air would hold the captives until the men landing rounded them up. The patrol knew how to do those things.

Russ laid himself down comfortably—he was not yet up to an attempt to make the shore, for his head was curiously light and pained him a good deal. So he watched from his post in the middle of the Rio Grande, like a lonely sentinel on duty to the last.

TESTING TIMES

GENERAL MALLORY, idolized chief of the Army Air Service, leaned out of the big service car in which he was riding, and gestured with his riding crop toward the group of sunburnt, khaki-clad young men who were lounging around in front of the operations office of the 114th Heavy Bombardment squadron.

"I know I'm talking to a Senator," he said to his portly companion; "so I'm mindful of what I'm saying. You're looking, sir, at a considerable portion of the Brigade—and the Brigade is, I firmly believe, the best single flying unit, measured by the skill of its flyers, in the world to-day."

Perhaps the General's belief in his young men, whom he had watched over the lines in France, along the border afterward, and in the transcontinental races; whom he had seen fly to Alaska and back, and perform in the Pulitzer races—perhaps his statement might have seemed exaggerated to the distinguished statesman who was with him, and yet it was as nearly correct as any general estimate could be. For Langham Field, sprawling on the rim of Chesapeake Bay in Virginia, was harboring in that summer the cream of the American Air Service.

Selected man by man, to carry out the greatest single enterprise any air service had been called on to accomplish in peace times, they had been gathered from the veterans of the Mexican Border Patrol, from the steel-nerved instructors of the cadet schools, from the test pilots of the experimental fields, and even drawn from the Philippines, Hawaii, and Panama when unusual skill warranted their inclusion in the Provisional Brigade.

What the General did not say to the Senator was that he realized that the supreme test of his airmen's vaunted ability was only three days away—and that with the eyes of the entire world on them, that handful of tanned young men would either turn over a new page in military tactics—or fail.

If the Chief realized that the dreams he had dreamed, and which he now had a chance to prove realities, were about to be proved either castles in the air, and nothing more, or facts so far-reaching that no man could accurately forecast what they meant to the future of civilization, he was not far ahead of those same flyers who were seemingly so unconcerned as they indulged in the facetious badinage which is a mark of their kind. Not a man there who was not tingling with the consciousness of what lay ahead, and each one was wondering whether, by any chance, he would be left out.

Russ Farrell's big body was sprawled widely under the shade cast by the wing of a Martin bomber. He would have been the last one to realize it, but

from the very inception of the project it had been almost inevitable that he be one of the flyers picked as members of the Brigade. He did not know how often he had proved himself since his entry into the flying corps. Not only in a flying sense—such happenings as those during the storm patrol at Verona and his accomplishments on the border—but in a deeper way. A reputation for faithful, even eager, performance of duty was not entirely to his credit, for it was based partly on his delight in flying itself, and his deep pride in the service.

Had he been of the type who are prone to overrate themselves, he would have saved himself much mental anguish for the two months preceding the arrival of orders commanding himself, Sleepy Spears, Jimmy Jennings, Tex MacDowell, and two others to entrain from McMullen to Langham Field for temporary duty. For almost a year the fact that General Mallory was trying to persuade Congress to appropriate funds in order that the Air Service might prove its power and ability had been known, but somehow it had seemed vague and unlikely that it would ever come to pass. Then, shortly after Russ had spoiled the plans of the emigrant smugglers down on the Rio Grande, it had suddenly come to a head.

From that moment Russ had desired, as he had never desired anything before, to be one of the band which would represent the flying corps in its greatest undertaking. It had seemed as though he could not bear it if he had to sit back in the sticks, so to

speak, and watch others meet the crisis while he did nothing. And he really had had no hope that he would be one of them. Who was he, the youngest flyer in the whole service, to expect to be selected from hundreds of veterans of the air—men older, more skilful, more experienced than himself?

He had let out a war-whoop which Tex MacDowell was certain had disturbed the sleep of several of the heathen Chinese when the order had been posted. As Tex remarked in his soft drawl, it was posted in the middle of the day, which was the middle of the night for the Chinese, and Russ should have more consideration for them than to do an imitation of the angel Gabriel blowing his well-known trump.

But Russ was happy and proud, and cared not who knew it. So, as he lay under the wing of the huge bomber, he was vastly contented as he remembered where he was. He did not know whether he would be one of the pilots to do the job three days hence—and he would have given his left hand to be one—but at any rate he had done something to help things along, and that was a privilege which was precious above rubies.

Next to him a thin, tall, dark young man whose sardonic face was slightly pale, was leaning against a wheel, whittling a stick.

"I suppose you're a sure shot to make the trip, Russ," he was saying. "That means that that poor, measly forty-million-dollar German battleship is as good as sunk right now."

Red-headed, freckle-faced Farrell grinned the wide grin which the Air Service knew so well as he gave ear to the well-remembered mockery of Fred Ridgeway, formerly his instructor and now his comrade and friend.

"Come out from behind those whiskers—I know you," he replied. "I'd give an ear to be assigned, but I've been relief pilot only a week, and I don't know whether George Humbert is back on duty or not. I've been flying his ship in practice."

It was easy to read on his face that the young pilot's heart was bound up in the coming test despite the casualness of his words. Ridgeway's mocking countenance softened a trifle as he glanced at the youngster beside him whom he had labored with back in the old days in Texas.

"I'd never have believed it when I rode in the front seat of a Jenny while you threw it all over the air trying to fly straight," he remarked, "but it's rumored about that you really can fly, Russ. Doggone funny thing, but that's what they say."

"You can't believe anything you hear, nowadays," grinned Farrell. Nevertheless, there was a warm feeling around his heart as Ridgeway paid him this characteristically indirect compliment. Then his face sobered quickly. "It'll be tough luck, Fred, if you're left out on account of being in the hospital so long. That would be the last word—to have the most experienced and best pilot on the field back on the ground while fellows like me were out there."

Ridgeway's thin lips twisted into a one-sided smile.

"You formed your opinion of my flying when you'd never made a hop, and anybody who could actually get you down all in one piece seemed to you to know more about flying than a whole squadron of angels. I still think my instructor back in 1916 was the best I ever saw—and he used to crack up so often I thought at first that crashing was the only way to land. I——"

"All right! 114th in the operations room, pronto!" yelled Captain Jack Beaman, adjutant of the squadron.

There was a queer dryness in Farrell's throat, and his heart skipped a couple of beats as he and Ridgeway joined the stream of flyers who poured into the building. In just about two minutes they would know which pilots and bombers were to fly eighty miles out at sea to represent their beloved service in the hour of its greatest test. And yet, bound up as he was in his own fate, he could not help thinking of the careless, quizzical Ridgeway. Fred had been ferrying a DeHaviland from Middletown, Pennsylvania, to Langham Field at the start of the summer, and the controls had given way . . . that meant the whole summer in the hospital, and he had never flown one of those four-ton, twin-motored bombers. And yet they could not overlook him.

"Listen, fellows," came Captain Lawton's voice. Russ snapped out of his reverie and lifted his eyes to

the six-feet-six C. O. of the 114th. Lawton was standing by his desk, a fateful slip of paper in his hand.

"Before I read this list, just a word or two that you perhaps realize as well as I. Yet it can't be said too often. We've been here all summer, practising to prepare ourselves to prove to the world that airplanes raining bombs can blow forty-million-dollar battleships right out of the water. In other words, that we are the real first line of defence. We've sunk a couple of destroyers already. But you know and I know that nothing will mean anything unless we prove the same thing can be done to the greatest floating fortresses ever constructed.

"For a couple of days scouts and DeHavilands will drop small bombs on the *Ostfriesland*. I suppose you know that that ship was the queen of the German Navy, and the most powerful ship afloat during the war. These small bombs, dropped as experiments to enable the official observers to collect the data they want, won't mean anything as far as sinking the ship goes. You can't stop a grizzly bear with a pop gun.

"The Atlantic fleet will be watching, and on board it half of the cabinet, including the secretaries of the army and the navy, will be watching, too. Military and naval attachés of every important country on the globe will be present, and about half of Congress. There is an army of newspaper men—next morning the whole world will decide just how im-

portant the flying corps is to the national defence.

"What I'm getting at is this. With our twenty Martin bombers, carrying ten two-thousand bombs and twenty eleven-hundreds, we've got to sink that ship. If we rise to the occasion, we can do it. But don't make any mistake—it's up to us, here in this room, to show the world that what we've been maintaining is true. The influence of what we do on the future of this country and others can't be figured. If an attacking fleet can be stopped by a coast guard of airplanes the United States may never be in another war—at least on its own soil.

"This is the final list. It's up to you all to live with your ships from now until Friday—to make sure they are working perfectly—to leave nothing undone that might help the success of the mission. The emergency starts now—not when you get out over the *Ostfriesland*. Any man who kicks; any man who is even slightly careless; any man who does not eat, drink, think, and live to the end that he and his ship get out there and do their stuff at the right time is nothing short of a traitor—and I don't mean to General Mallory and the flying corps alone, either.

"All right. Ship No. 1, Captain Lawton, pilot, Captain Beaman, bomber. Ship No. 2, MacDowell, pilot, Hickman bomber. Ship No. 3"—Slowly, inexorably, the lanky squadron commander read off the list. The ship Russ had been flying was 17; George Humbert was standing near, his

heart in his eyes, wondering whether he would get his ship back.

"No. 17, Lieutenant Farrell, pilot; Lieutenant Ridgeway, bomber."

The electric thrill that had galvanized Russ merged into a sort of dazed unbelief at the end of the Captain's sentence. During the few seconds which it took Lawton to read off the final three ships and their crews his eyes found Ridgeway's. That master-flyer's flat-cheeked face was a study, but as his gaze met that of his former pupil, his eyebrows arched upward, and his mouth widened in the usual saturnine grin.

"Why, Fred—it's—it's ridiculous!" stormed Russ a few minutes later. "Me—flying you! I'll go to Captain Lawton and tell him——"

"Pull in your neck—you're coming to a tunnel, kid," counseled Ridgeway serenely as they emerged from the operations office. "I won't deny that I'd give something to pilot one of those big beauties out over the *Ostfriesland*, but they're right. I'd need some practice, maybe. And I'm lucky to go in any capacity. Now let's look over our ship, old-timer, interview the crew chief, and make sure that we've got a baby that'll get us there and not kick over the traces. What kind of a crew chief and crew have you got on it?"

"Crew's all right, but the crew chief has been on his ear ever since that order came through making it necessary to take a bunch of crew men off flying

status," responded Russ absently. He was thinking of Ridgeway. Why, he was actually embarrassed! Ridgeway, one of the greatest flyers in the whole army when Russ himself had never even had a flight; the man who had taught him everything he knew about flying; the man who had been one of the half-dozen picked to make the Alaska flight—and that man was to ride in a ship piloted by the youngest flyer in the army, and his own former pupil!

"Hey, hey! Snap out of your trance, Russ! You quit thinking about flying me—what's the matter, are you afraid I'll start bawling you out like I did when you were a raggedy kaydet? Now tell me what's biting your crew chief, how serious the bite is, whether we need to apply any medicine thereto, and so forth, and so on, world without end."

Something in the cool poise and self-control of Ridgeway, plus that curious understanding of other people's inner thoughts which had been a characteristic of the older man's in the days when Farrell was fighting the nervewracking battles of a cadet, stung Russ out of his abstraction. They were walking down the row of tremendous corrugated iron hangars which rimmed the southern edge of Langham. On the northern side of the field, one huge balloon hangar was visible, and eastward the field ran to the edge of Chesapeake Bay. Facing the field, to their right as they walked west, a line of Martins squatted like the monsters of the air they were. Two Libertys each, weighing four tons and

capable of lifting two tons more, wingspread seventy feet—truly they were awe-inspiring and it did not seem as though anything could withstand them. As they came close to number 17 Russ stopped in his tracks.

"About that crew chief—you were in the hospital when it happened, but I suppose you know about it," he said. "This economy wave in the government made the War Department order that practically all enlisted men be taken off flying status. Consequently, they lost that fifty per cent. extra pay, which means considerable——"

"And the mechanics of the Air Service never showed what stuff they were made of any more plainly than when this bunch here rallied right around and began working harder than ever," Ridgeway pointed out. "I was talking with old Sarge Bennett a while ago—these fellows are as much bound up in what we do out there as General Mallory himself. They've been working night and day on ships that were out of order——"

"Sure," Russ cut in. "But Grayson—17's crew chief—has been sore as a pup ever since he got taken off flying. I tried to get him to talk things out with me, but he shut up like a surly clam. Can't blame him for being sore, but he's been lying down. Not that, exactly, either, but he's been moping around, sullen and unwilling—you know. He's a bolshevik. He's lost all interest in this test. I haven't pinned anything definite on him, except a few minor things.

Now that I know I'm going to fly the mission, I'll be Johnny-on-the spot, though. He resents every order, and all that stuff."

"Well, let's see," suggested Ridgeway, and they walked over to the ship.

The crew were lying in the shade of the wings. They all scrambled to their feet, save one, who appeared to be asleep.

"Shall we take her up and try her out?" inquired Russ.

"Not a bad idea," assented Ridgeway. "I'd enjoy the ride, anyway, and it'll give me a chance to get used to it before practice to-morrow."

"Is she full of gas and oil?" Russ asked one of the overalled mechanics.

"I—don't think so, sir," stammered the private.

"Why not?"

Farrell's question was like the crack of a whiplash.

"I—I don't know, sir. I asked the sergeant about it, but he said there wasn't any hurry——"

"Where is he?"

Another one of the three crew men, a clean-faced young fellow of about Farrell's age, pointed under the wing. Then, without waiting for an order, he stooped down and shook the stocky figure stretched in the shade.

Grayson rolled over, and scrambled to his feet. His face was very dark, and filled with deep lines. His shoulders were wide and powerful above a barrel-like body that was upheld by legs like tree-

trunks. His gray-brown hair was untidy from contact with the ground, and he had left his hat lying under the ship. He saluted automatically, his eyes meeting the flaming blue ones of his superior without wavering.

"Grayson, why isn't 17 gassed, oiled, and ready to go at a moment's notice?" demanded Russ.

"Why, sir, the gas truck's been busy, an' I didn't figure you was going up."

"How do you know it's been busy? Dream it?"

Grayson's seamed face was sullen, and set in stubborn lines. Eyes on the ground, he mumbled something indistinguishable.

"Ever since your pay was cut, you've been unfit to be a sergeant or a crew chief. At a time like this, when every man is needed to work twenty hours a day if necessary, you've been whining around here like a sick cat. You haven't taken any interest in your ship, or anything else but squawling. Starting to-day, I'm permanent pilot of this ship. The next time I catch you lying down on the job, off come your sergeant's stripes, if it takes a courtmartial to do it and my name on the charge sheet. If you can't forget yourself right now you ought to be cleaning out kitchens, not handling men!"

Russ was impulsive, and he was utterly bound up in the work he had to do. Nevertheless, his wrath would not have swept him into this blistering denunciation of the sergeant had it not been well-deserved, twice over. To Russ, who had submerged

himself completely in the service he loved so well, the ever-growing sullenness and laziness, often bordering on open disrespect for orders, which had characterized Grayson were not only incomprehensible, but contemptible.

Grayson took one look into the glinting eyes staring down at him, saluted, and hurriedly dispatched a private after the gas truck. He busied himself around the ship, his dully flushed face bent low over his work as though to avoid meeting the officer's eyes. A half-hour later Russ and Ridgeway took the big ship up for a test. Russ found that it was slightly right-wing heavy, and that one battery was scarcely charging at all. To his shouted offer to let Ridgeway change seats and pilot for a while the veteran shook his head. "Not time enough, now!" he yelled in return. When they landed and taxied to the line Russ noticed that Ridgeway was unusually pale, and after he had reached the ground he staggered slightly.

"My first trip since the hospital—I'm a bit weak, I guess," Ridgeway explained with a twisted smile. "Think you can keep the secret, if you try?"

"I'll strap on my muzzle," promised Russ, and then turned to Grayson.

"Right-wing heavy, and the right voltmeter needs stepping up. Battery not charging. And another thing, Grayson. You're going to fly out to sea with us—maybe you'll take some interest in this ship if you have to ride in it. Oh, I know I can't *make*

you fly the trip, but I can spread the word that you wouldn't go—you know what that'll mean! There's no excuse for the condition the ship is in; so get it perfect!"

The sergeant's leathery face was set in bitter lines as he saluted and turned away.

At four o'clock in the morning of the third day thereafter the twenty squat Martins were drawn up in two lines across the field, ready for the takeoff. Two Libertys on each ship were roaring away on the warmup, their exhausts breathing flame. Veiled by the groundmist, they looked like mysterious monsters of some bygone age, spitting fire in their anxiety to leap upon their prey. Helmeted figures in each of them bent their heads to read the maze of instruments in front, and on the motors. The zero hour was not far away.

Suddenly a man in the middle of the field waved a flag. In instant response the middle Martin in the first row went into full cry, and started lumbering across the field. In five seconds the two on each side of it started, followed in pairs by the others. Soon a tremendous V was roaring across the smooth field. As the first ten ships took the air, the second line started. Russ Farrell, tense and drawn with the strain of the past few days and the imminence of the test, crouched at the wheel. His motors, set on each wing just far enough from the cockpits to allow the propellers to rotate, were running smoothly. Beside him was Ridgeway. Immediately behind the cock-

pit in which they were sitting was the huge bomb compartment, which now held a single bomb weighing a ton. Nine hundred and fifty pounds of it was pure T.N.T. Ahead of his seat, in the nose of the ship, was the bomber's cockpit, to which Ridgeway would climb when the time came. Ten feet back of where Russ was sitting, in the rear of the bomb compartment, was another cockpit, occupied by Grayson. Fifteen feet back of the noncom the two huge rudders wiggled back and forth under Farrell's nervous feet.

When his time came, Farrell's ready hand shoved on both throttles and he braced himself against the wheel. The cockpit was ten feet above the ground, and it seemed that the roughness was communicated to the passengers with magnified force. It took all his strength to get the tail off the ground. It seemed ages before the great bomber picked up speed, but just before it appeared inevitable that the ship would roll on into Chesapeake Bay it took the air. Being already in formation on the takeoff, there was little to do but close up. As they passed over the twin capes which guard the Bay from the open sea the twenty ships were lined up in two V's, thundering out over the Atlantic with their load of destruction, manned by tiny humans who looked like goggle-eyed gnomes of the upper air.

Russ scrutinized his instruments to make sure he had synchronized the motors—they had to be regulated so that each was turning up exactly the same numbers of revolutions in order that the pull of each

propeller be the same. Satisfied, he took time to look down on the limitless steel-gray Atlantic which was rolling in easy swells below.

There was a line of destroyers, spaced ten miles apart, along the eighty miles to the target. The long, lean greyhounds of the sea were cradled in the waves, and from their decks their crews looked up and waved encouragement to the aerial caravan sweeping along above them.

A half-hour, and they were halfway to the target. Russ, flying almost automatically, was immersed in thoughts of what lay ahead. For two days the newspapers had flaunted the headlines: "*Ostfriesland* Still Afloat." The world could not understand that those small bombs could not possibly sink it; but that did not affect the proposition that those two V's of Martins, each with one shot at the target, must sink the battleship. Could the pilots fly with such absolute perfection that the bombs would drop truly? If a ship were even slightly off-keel, flying any way but absolutely level——

The feel of the ship which is the fundamental quality of a born flyer suddenly gave Russ a warning. There was a slight pull to the left. His eyes snapped to the instrument board. The left-hand motor had dropped from fourteen hundred and fifty revolutions a minute to thirteen fifty. He shoved the throttle a bit ahead. It picked up, and there was a sputter. It was just a slight miss, but with double ignition that should not happen.

He bent his head to listen to the left-hand motor. Its rhythm was not even and firm.

Then Ridgeway grasped his arm, and pointed toward the motor.

"Left distributor head!" he yelled, and Russ saw what was the matter.

In some way the left-hand distributor head had come loose. It was now held partially by only one clamp. A Liberty has double ignition—that is, two sets of spark plugs for each cylinder, fed by two different distributor heads. One was loose, which meant only one set of plugs was working. This reduced the power—and the motor was missing slightly on the working set. And they were sixty miles out at sea. And, more important than a plunge into the ocean for them, they *must* be there to drop that bomb!

Already Ridgeway was unstrapping his belt. He grasped the strut back of the cockpit, and pulled himself up on the bomb compartment. Then, while Russ flew as perfectly as he knew how, Ridgeway eased himself down on the left wing, and started groping his way toward the motor. In his hand he held safety wire which he had taken from the toolkit.

Aiding himself by wires and struts, he got to the motor safely. Russ fell out of the formation—he had no time to try to keep position now. He must fly as he never had before, while Fred was out there on the wing.

The terrific airblast of the propeller—strong

enough to blow a man off his feet—forced Ridgeway to wind one arm around a strut as he tried to wire the distributor head on. Evidently the clamps were useless, for some reason. It was a difficult job to hold on and still do the work. He was holding it on, now, and the motor was working all right.

It seemed ages before Ridgeway was actually twisting the wire. With painful slowness he worked, one-handed. Russ stole a look at him, just in time to see him chance using both hands for a moment.

At that moment a bump hit the ship, and snapped the right wing upward. Perhaps it was that, or it might have been the propeller wash, or Ridgeway's physical weakness—more likely a combination of all three—but he staggered slightly, lost balance, and fell sideways against the motor. Russ, momentarily paralyzed with horror, saw his old instructor's head hit the rocker arms heavily. His body slumped as he instinctively grasped a strut. The next instant he was lying limply against the motor, one relaxed arm curved around a strut. He had lost consciousness—and no telling to what extent the hot Liberty would burn him.

As had happened before in his flying career, there came a white-hot instant of complete mental clarity to Russ, and his mind flashed instinctively to the only solution. He turned in his seat, and his blazing blue eyes focused on the greenish-white countenance of Grayson. With his free arm he motioned Grayson to crawl ahead over the bomb compartment.

It seemed that the noncom did not understand. But he did—he must. The man was in the grip of utter demoralizing fear, shaking like a leaf. Into Farrell's coldly glinting eyes came a look that was akin to madness, and his set face twisted into a snarl as he cut both motors and shouted viciously:

"Come up here, you yellow hound!"

Whether results were due to what Grayson saw in his chief's face, or to the man's own fundamental qualities coming to the surface, Russ did not know, but without a word Grayson snaked forward over the runway on top of the bomb racks. The sergeant's eyes were narrowed to slits, and his mouth was so tight that it looked like a gash in his dark face. He dropped into Ridgeway's seat like a sack of meal.

"Try to keep her level!" yelled Russ, and Grayson nodded. Somehow or other Russ found comfort in the set, drawn face of the mechanic as the man's steady eyes met his.

Russ got the ship level, stabilized it a trifle, and then slipped out from under the wheel. Grayson slid into place, and grasped the control. Russ fastened the belt around the amateur pilot, and then climbed up on the bomb compartment.

As he expected, the ship began to buck and skid wildly through the air. Grayson was working desperately, but it was inevitable that he over-control. He had never flown a ship before. Russ was well aware of the desperate chance he was taking. The only hope he had was that Grayson's many

flights as a passenger had given him feel enough of the ship so that he could keep it from stalling and then going into a spin. It was to be expected that the ship would dive and teeter through the air under the sergeant's hands—Russ himself must fight his way along the wing and hold on.

Three times he was thrown as the ship careened wildly. Once he barely saved himself from a half-mile drop by a one-hand hold. The wing was now up, now down. One moment the speed would be tremendous, and the next horribly low as the ship seemed wavering for a spin.

Forgetful of the water below, or of the bombing ahead, or the destroyer beneath the ship where hundreds of men were watching in mute horror, Russ fought his way to Ridgeway. He tore the belt from his leather coat, holding on with the other arm, and then used every ounce of strength in his body to haul Ridgeway away from the motor. For a second he thought it was all over as the Martin dipped viciously and threw them both against the Liberty, but he staggered to his feet again. Ten seconds later he was lashing Ridgeway to a strut, and was on his way back. There was a huge bump over Fred's eye, and a wicked-looking burn had seared one side of his helmet through.

The ship was only three hundred feet off the water when he got back to his seat. Grayson, his face beaded with sweat, subsided limply in the next seat.

No sooner had Russ regained control of the ship

than he felt the noncom's grip on his arm. He looked around, and beheld Ridgeway making his unsteady way along the wing. The instructor caught Farrell's eye, and the ghost of his twisted smile lightened the grimness of his face.

The other Martins were out of sight. Russ flew toward the target, both motors wide open. His mind was in a whirl. They must get there and drop their bomb—and yet it was a certainty that Ridgeway, faint and dizzy as he was, could not focus his eyes through the bomb-sight up ahead and drop the 2000-pound projectile with any accuracy.

As Fred reached the runway over the bomb racks and slowly hauled himself up on it, there was a brief, sharp struggle in Farrell's breast. It was not that a bomber was less important than a pilot, exactly—almost perfect skill on the part of both was a necessity. It was the old pride of a pilot—to handle his huge ship, and never leave it.

Then, as Ridgeway's hand gripped his shoulder and he turned to look into the cool, pain-filled eyes of the man who had moulded and made him an airman, the struggle was over, and a surge of shamed self-disgust swept over him. Who was he to think of self at a time like that? And deep down in his heart he knew how Ridgeway would cherish the thought that he had handled a Martin on that day. And he could do it, even if he had to fight off unconsciousness.

Far ahead, like spots on the water, a fan-shaped formation of battleships came in sight. High in the

air two dirigibles gleamed like silver. And two dozen tiny specks stood out against the sky.

Russ slipped out of his seat, holding the wheel with one hand. Ridgeway flopped into it, and took the wheel. Russ yelled in his ear:

"You can fly, but you can't bomb! I'll drop it!"

Then he crawled through the hole between the bomber's cockpit and the pilot's seat, strapped the free-swinging observer's belt around him, and watched. Already the Martins had dropped their sighting shots—hundred pounders—and were making for the great gray dreadnaught which looked like a monster crouched defiantly to fight off its comparatively tiny enemies. One by one he saw the projectiles drop. Great geysers of water were flung high in the air as bomb after bomb shot downward. Twice he saw bombs hit flush on the deck, and burst in a mass of solid flame. Each Martin struck its one blow—and passed on. And the *Ostfriesland* was still afloat.

Ridgeway would know that an altitude of two thousand feet was necessary. He must have it, now, for the Martin was flying level, and wide open, to get there in time. The last ship was straightened for the target when Russ dropped to his knees and examined the bomb sight. He knew it had been set for speed, altitude, and windage before they left the field. It was placed over a slab of plate-glass on the floor of the cockpit. He glued his eye to it for a moment, and then looked around at Ridgeway.

Fred's face was white as chalk, and the lines were

etched deep around his mouth. And yet he was flying the bomber as perfectly as only a master-airman could. Russ, satisfied, buckled to his work. He watched steadily, through the bomb sight, for a sight of the *Ostfriesland*, hoping he would not see it. He did not think of the thousands of eyes down below, nor of the hundred odd great men of the country who were there, nor of General Mallory, watching from his DeHaviland—every faculty was concentrated in his eyes.

Then the *Ostfriesland* came in sight—awash, but afloat. With upflung hands he guided Ridgeway until the Martin was pointed straight for the target. Once squared away for it, it roared along as smoothly as though sliding over ice. The flying could not be more perfect.

In a second when his sight caught the bead on the target, he jerked two wires. One primed the bomb, the other released it. He snapped to his feet and with his heart in his eyes he watched.

At first it looked to be dropping straight downward, keeping directly under the ship. It seemed to be half a mile back of the crippled dreadnaught. Then, as it got nearer the water, it seemed to start moving forward across the surface of the sea. Finally, it appeared to swoop around in a wide arc until it was going horizontally above the water.

It was coming close to the *Ostfriesland*—and it wasn't dropping at all! Russ groaned aloud as he thought despairingly:

"It's going way over it——"

Then a mighty mass of water, like Niagara Falls reversed, hid the former monarch of the seas from sight. It seemed as though the Atlantic had been flung from its bed. As the white mountain of spray fell back into place, a gray bulk became visible.

Slowly, as though tired and seeking rest, the mighty floating fortress turned on its side, then its back. Nose first, it started down. In a few seconds, only a bit of the stern was above water.

As that disappeared, Russ shouted. He danced on the floor of the cockpit, yelling at the top of his voice —and could not hear even himself. Down below, bedlam was loose. The decks of the Atlantic fleet were alive with dancing, cheering, raving men. Dignified generals and congressmen slapped each other on the back and acted human. General Mallory's brightly painted DeHaviland cavorted like a drunken centipede on ice with a skate at the end of each leg. Back in the pilot's cockpit, Ridgeway quietly fainted.

Grayson held the wheel for the second it took Russ to get back there. Then they succeeded in transferring Ridgeway to the seat alongside the pilot's, while Russ got under the wheel. He was nearly thrown out before he got there, but finally Grayson was in the bomber's cockpit, Russ at the wheel, and Ridgeway riding limply alongside of Farrell.

Destroyer after destroyer gave the victorious squadron a royal greeting, like the good sportsmen

they were—and back at Langham Field General Mallory, whose DeHaviland was faster than the Martins, was waiting at the head of an excited crowd, army men and civilians. There were tears in his eyes as he tried to tell the deliriously happy airmen what they had done.

Ridgeway, pale and shaky but as cool and calm as always, listened quietly. When it was over, he said slowly:

"It's been quite a day, Russ."

And there was no mockery in it.

"Pardon me, Lieutenant," came Grayson's voice. They turned to look down at the weather-beaten sergeant. "I been wrong. When a man gettin' a little over a hundred a month, with a sick wife and a kid, gets one-third of his pay taken away, maybe he hadn't ought tuh get sore—but I did. I didn't give a whoop what happened. And I was wrong.

"That distributor head wasn't my fault, sir—honest. Them things will happen. And back there when yuh wanted me to crawl ahead and help—I was yelluh, sir. I admit it. I've always been kind of afraid; was in a bad wreck once. I been flyin' on account o' needin' the money. And I want tuh thank yuh, sir, fur makin' me come to bat. And, if you'll pardon me, both of yuh, I want tuh tell yuh that even if yuh don't believe it, I'm ashamed o' myself. And I'm proud tuh have been in 17 this day with yuh!"

He walked away slowly, and there was an un-

readable expression on Ridgeway's sardonic countenance as he watched. Then he turned to Russ.

"I presume I ought to thank you for saving my life. I would, except that right now I'm sorry you did it. I'm afraid I may live—that's the way I feel. There's one thing certain—if I live the next hour I'll live forever." He added with a grin. "'So saying, the cripple turned on his heel and staggered toward bed.'" That was Ridgeway's way, always.

RUSS RUNS WRAYVILLE

LANGHAM Field, one morning a few days later, was overspread with a great calm. It was as peaceful as the placid waters of Chesapeake Bay, which lapped gently against the rim of the airdrome. The bombing tests were over, and the Brigade could relax luxuriously in the knowledge of duty well done.

At that, a considerable number of them had no opportunity to relax. Over in the wilds of West Virginia a few hundred miners, gone berserk under the spur of radical agitators, had formed themselves into an outlaw army and were marching on the mines. Martial law had been declared in Cass County and Federal troops were on the ground. As a last resort, a squadron of DeHavilands from Langham Field had roared away across the Cumberlands two days before to help put down what amounted to civil war. The absence of fifty flyers—the airmen, as a rule, are not peaceful and quiet young men—helped to make Langham Field seem as devoid of life as a graveyard at two o'clock in the morning. All summer it had been the scene of frantic activity—now not a ship dotted its level expanse. Even the barracks where Russ Farrell lived was a place of peace and quiet.

Jimmy Jennings, his room-mate, was in his favorite

attitude—flat on his back, reading. He was enswathed in an aged bathrobe, and was pursuing the morning paper with interest. Jimmy hadn't given up hope of being ordered over to Cass County yet, and he took a secret satisfaction in reading about the growing seriousness of the situation there. He spoke now to this effect.

"Of course, I wouldn't want 'em to keep on killing each other for my special benefit—but if they should need some more of us it would just prove that every cloud has a silver lining."

"Uh huh," nodded Russ, and then lapsed into silence. His big body was sunk low in his chair, his booted feet on the desk. And on his face there was an expression of unwonted gravity. Usually his freckled countenance, below a mop of sandy hair, mirrored the hint of a smile, or a full-fledged smile, or a wide and whole-souled grin. Now his blue eyes were narrowed a bit, and his mind was a thousand miles away.

Jennings—a slim, dark-haired, handsome youngster who was an ace on the official records and who could fly a single-seater or even a DeHaviland in a manner that few living men could equal—glanced at his friend casually, noticed the letter in his hand, and said nothing.

Farrell's shadowed eyes dropped to the letter and he reread it. It was in his mother's handwriting, and had been mailed from Bluefield, Massachusetts. Bluefield was the place where Russ had originated, so

to speak, and where he had spent his entire life save for two years at college and the three teeming years in the Air Service.

It was devoted mainly to sprightly news of his friends in Bluefield, together with mention of the fact that Doc Hayner had been elected mayor. Will Ingals was the new chief of police. Gene Butts had been married, and the Bluefield baseball team had not lost a game.

It was the last paragraphs which made him thoughtful, though. For the third time he read them:

> Father isn't feeling as well as usual. The business is growing so fast—and he's over sixty now and not able to carry increased burdens as well as he could ten years ago. He's tried three different men as managers, but somehow he can't find the right man for the place, and he has to run things himself, pretty largely.
>
> Everybody here has been following the newspaper stories of the bombing, and the town was quite wrought up when you sank the *Ostfriesland.* I can scarcely conceive of my son's being a part of so great an enterprise.
>
> Wasn't Lieutenant Kelly, who was killed at Langham Field a few days ago, the young man you knew so well at Donovan Field? Every time I pick up the paper my heart skips a beat—it seems that so many flyers are killed or injured. Oh, Russell, my son, be careful!
>
> Lovingly,
>
> MOTHER.

The last sentence was the first that had ever escaped his mother about *that*—and suddenly Russ realized, in an overwhelming wave of feeling, what tortures she had gone through those years. He had

been injured several times—thoughtlessly he had written home about it, even if he did belittle the danger which still was all too apt to swoop down on the airman——

"Beg pardon, sir. Colonel Jackson presents his compliments to Lieutenant Farrell, and requests that he report to the operations office at once."

Russ returned the orderly's salute automatically. Jennings snapped to his feet, and his black eyes sparkled.

"Ten to one you're bound for that teapot war—and, Russ, if you don't get me in on it I'll pick every freckle out of your face with a pair of tweezers!"

"Hey, hey!" jeered Russ from the doorway. "You and who else? I could wear you for a watch charm!"

Five minutes later he was standing in the presence of Colonel "Lamb" Jackson. Lamb in private, never in public. It isn't good form to call a Colonel by pet names in the army.

He was a small man with a spike-like moustache, who always appeared to be suffering with an incipient attack of St. Vitus dance.

"'Lo Farrell, come in," he said tersely, striding up and down the office. "Sit down. Listen. You leave for West Virginia in one hour, flying a Martin bomber with two thousand pounds of bombs aboard. Young will fly another ship——"

A tall figure filled the doorway. It was Young, a lean, hook-nosed chap from Louisiana who was a

star big-ship pilot. The Colonel invited him in, repeated what he had just told Russ, and then resumed:

"Situation is this. The unions and the mine operators of some non-union fields have been discussing the unionizing of those fields. Doing it in a calm and orderly manner. But some Bolshevik agitators—wild-eyed anarchists—thought that action wasn't coming fast enough. They succeeded in getting a few hundred of the lowest and most ignorant miners—mostly illiterate foreigners who can scarcely speak English—to rebel against their union officials and law and order as well, form themselves into an army, and try to capture these mines and unionize 'em by force. This isn't a capital and labor war—the unions are just as much against these outlaws as anybody else. What it is, is civil war, nothing less.

"We thought martial law, declared in Cass County, would stop 'em automatically. It hasn't. We sent airplanes to scout. This army is out in the woods, fighting pitched battles with the troops. Not enough troops yet to do much.

"General Allen figured bombs—merely the threat of 'em—dropped from the air would stop 'em without bloodshed. Probably will. Sinton and Dan Symons left early this morning with fifteen hundred pounds of twenty-five-pound personnel bombs. Thought they'd be plenty.

"Just got a wire from General Allen. Seems that

the outlaws are being joined by recruits from other places—riff raff. Agitators working under cover everywhere. Force has now increased to over a thousand. Consequently, we must be ready to do more than bluff, if necessary. Must have more bombs, and machine-gun ammunition. You carry 'em to Charleston, which is the base for the airplanes. And you must get there. Pick your own relief pilots. Young, who do you want?"

"Hughes, sir."

"Farrell?"

"Jennings, sir."

"He's not a big ship pilot."

"He can fly 'em, sir. He's my roommate, he's crazy to go, and I'd rather fly with him, if necessary, than most pilots."

"Suit yourself. But you're chief pilot. Any questions?"

"No, sir."

"Get yourself maps from the sergeant, notify your relief pilots, be on line at eleven o'clock sharp, and keep your mouths shut if you happen to see any civilians. That's all."

At precisely eleven five Russ and Jennings were sitting side by side in the pilots' cockpit of the big twin-motored Martin bomber. The bomb compartment against which their backs rested was filled with a solid ton of twenty-five-pound bombs. Russ shoved the throttles on all the way, and his eyes

roved from one tachometer to the other to see how the two Libertys were tuning up. Each massive motor was set on a wing, five feet from the cockpit, and a veritable maze of heavy struts surrounded them like the limbs of a tree. The propeller tips barely escaped hitting the sides of the cockpit, coming so close that two iron headguards were set on the edges of the cowling to prevent thoughtless airmen from looking over the side.

Young and Hughes taxied out on the field, and Russ, satisfied with his motors, followed them. He advanced both spark-levers all the way, and nodded to Jimmy. Jennings fed the motors the throttles while Russ braced himself against the wheel. The four-ton ship bumped across the field, and slowly the tail came up. A hundred yards on it took the air, and suddenly became easy to fly. The wheel spun easily to bank, and a baby could have pushed the wheel forward or pulled it back to make the ship dive or climb. The rudder bar handled the two huge rudders easily.

For an hour the two ships roared along up the James River, and the compass in front of Russ showed the course to be almost due west. Petersburgh, on the south, fell behind, and then Richmond, north of them. For another half-hour they flew at seven thousand feet, under a sullen layer of clouds that stretched from horizon to horizon. Below them there was broken country—foothills rolling up to the gigantic Cumberlands which loomed ahead.

A half-hour later the ships hurtled across the first

jagged peaks of the range, and ahead of them was a seemingly limitless panorama of towering mountains and jagged ravines. Although the altimeter showed seven thousand feet, the crests of those peaks were less than a thousand feet below them. And they were so close to the clouds that occasionally feathers of mist swept across the far-spreading wings of the Gargantuan bomber.

A thunderstorm came in view ahead—a dark mass of vapor beneath which there were slanting lines of rain. They dodged that, only to find three other storms hanging in the air. They wove a serpentine course through and around them.

Russ kept glancing down at that breath-taking scene of untamed grandeur below. Dense forest covered every inch of the ground save for naked cliffs that fell away into the tangled depths of deep-cut gorges. Not a field to land on—not even a hut to hint that a man had ever set foot in those trackless wastes. The thought of the two motors was comforting—particularly with a ton of high explosive within inches of his body.

Suddenly stinging drops of rain burnt his face. He wiped his goggles, and settled to business. The Martin went curving around the tiny storm, but as it started back for its course again nothing but a blank wall of sullen mist, shot with lightning, lay ahead. At that moment the ship ahead disappeared into the opaque of clouds. There was nothing else to do.

Abruptly the earth was blotted from sight, and

the infinite torture of the rain started. Rolling, crashing thunder seemed to shake the Martin, and livid lightning played about the ship. Tremendous air currents sent it up or down, mercilessly. With no land in sight to guide him in keeping the ship level, Russ had to trust his own feel of the ship, plus the airspeed meter. If the speed dropped, the ship was climbing too fast, and stalling—if, as it frequently did, the needle jumped to a hundred and thirty or forty miles an hour and the breath was torn from their nostrils, it meant pull up, for they were flashing earthward through that solid mass of mist and rain.

A new and desperate peril menaced them suddenly. The ship dropped like a stone, until it was less than six thousand feet high. Russ tried to handle his ship against the power of the tempest, and climb——

The dark mass ahead grew suddenly darker—black. Instinctively he pulled back with all his strength, and tried to bank. The ship rushed through the air before it took hold, and in a vertical bank, side-slipping the while. It just escaped the sheer mountainside toward which it had been headed. They were below the level of the mountains, and as blind, almost, as though they had no eyes.

Jennings constantly wiped off Farrell's fogged goggles while the young pilot grimly fought his way up. At any second another mountain might loom in front of the ship. Bit by bit, flying in a circle, he

succeeded in climbing. There is no greater test of airmanship in a storm. His bruised and battered face was a mass of red splotches, and it seemed as though a thousand needles were pricking into his raw flesh. The compass spun uselessly, neutralized by the electricity in the storm. The wires shrieked a devil's song, the thunder was like the voice of giants, and the lightning like their blinking eyes gloating over the frail humans who would defy them.

With a gasp of relief Russ saw the altimeter get to seven thousand feet. The rain increased in fury, and the wind was suddenly a roaring gale which came from all sides at once and all but tore the wheel from Farrell's hands. It was a veritable cauldron of the winds that they were in. The Libertys which had seemed so mighty were now puny toys. Their roar which had once been a deafening diapason of power was subdued to a whisper, drowned by the continuous thunder.

Gradually it seemed as though the fury of the struggle called to something wild and untamed in Russ. Instead of the terrible nervous strain which had been keeping him as taut as drawn wire he was suddenly aware of a fierce joy in that titanic battle. He thrust his battered face forward, as though daring the storm to do its worst, and as his powerful shoulders and arms threw the wheel around to counteract the storm he felt as a rider might who was breaking an outlaw horse. He glanced over at Jimmy Jennings, a tight-lipped smile on his face and

his blue eyes blazing behind his owl-like goggles. The unregenerate Jennings shouted something which was entirely indistinguishable, and then laughed. The slim young ace figuratively snapped his fingers at the storm, and dared it.

On and on they fought, blindly groping. At times the storm was comparatively mild, and then again it would go to a crescendo of shrieking malevolence. Russ was drawn and utterly weary, the spirit of him almost gone. Incongruously his thoughts went back to Bluefield. Nearly two o'clock. The quiet tree-shaded streets were probably flooded with sunlight. His father and mother would just be getting up from lunch in their tranquil little dining room. Lizzie, the housekeeper, would be singing some lugubrious hymn in the kitchen. Suddenly the thought smote him: Suppose they knew that he was helpless in the grip of a storm above the peaks and gorges of the Cumberlands, with a ton of high explosive to make a wreck complete?

Like magic the earth came into view. Just for a moment, but what a blessed sight it was! For once even a wilderness was welcome. Two minutes passed during which the mist showed holes through which the earth was visible. The rain fell away to nothing, which was a blessed relief to their faces. Then the Martin thundered out of the clouds into smiling sunlight which made the water-soaked earth sparkle.

They were still over the mountains. Probably had been flying in a huge circle for the last hour or so,

Russ reflected. They were absolutely lost—no telling where they were. They might be in Tennessee. The only thing to do was find a landing place, and enquire regarding what county and state they might be in.

"Might as well fly west," he soliloquized. "It can't get us further away, and might bring us nearer Charleston. We've got maybe an hour of gas left, if the oil holds out. Wonder where Young and Hughes are? Maybe still back there in the storm——"

As though in answer to his question, he felt Jimmy's hand gripping his arm so fiercely that he winced. A glance at the ace's flashing dark eyes, and Russ followed his pointing finger with his eyes.

A Martin was just emerging from the black, lightning-shot mass of the storm. The ship seemed to be reeling and staggering through the air. As he watched, he saw it fall off. It began to spin slowly as it fell down toward the deep cleft between two mountains.

By intuition Russ was aware that the ship was completely out of control. It fell inexorably, with never a sign of straightening out. The Bomber had broken under the strain of the storm.

Suddenly the faces of the two airmen were impassive and set. In their eyes there was a look of tragic questioning as they watched the inevitable. They were curiously old, then—as though they had looked often into the face of death, and had learned something of the meaning of life.

Deep down in a rocky gorge the four-ton ship smashed into bits. A solid mass of red flame seemed to fill the cleft between the hills. Then dense clouds of black smoke, shot with red, mercifully hid the funeral pyre of the two airmen. Of course they had been killed by the impact, and the fire meant little. Round and round that smoking wreck the Martin, high in the sky, seemed to be holding vigil over the remains of its comrade. Below there was no human being to watch or know what was buried in those rocky fastnesses.

Soon the smoke cleared—and a charred spot on the ground was all that remained. Remnants of the motor, melted, and a twisted mass of wire—that was all.

Jimmy met Farrell's shadowed blue eyes, and shrugged his shoulders with the fatalism of the flyer. Russ turned west. There was nothing he could do down there, even if landing were a possibility. And there was much to do ahead. The bombs must get to Charleston.

Three quarters of an hour later the Martin was circling over a small town which was the center of several winding concrete roads leading from the mountains. Several mining villages were in sight, clinging to the hillsides near the mouths of the mines, from one to three miles out of town. Being Saturday afternoon, the main street, which was about the only street in town, was black with people and

automobiles, and every living soul was gaping up at the monster of the air which was roaring along three hundred feet above them.

Russ had no idea what town it was, but he did know that he had to land. There was only one possible place—the flat top of a hill a half mile from the town, and to the east of it. The grass was so wet that it sparkled with blinding radiance under the rays of the sun. On all four sides the hill sloped away sharply. The flat top was less than thirty feet wide. If the Martin rolled off-course to either side, it would crash down the slope, out of control. The same thing would happen if he overshot, and landed a bit too fast. There was nothing to do but try it, however. The gas would give out any minute, and already the oil-pressure indicators stood at ten pounds and five, respectively.

It was tight maneuvering for the mountains were so close that the ship barely had room to circle. Russ straightened for the field from the north, and gradually cut his motors as he came closer. He must land at the very edge of the flat top, to have all the space possible to roll in.

As he cleared the trees which grew alongside a road at the northern edge of the field he cut the motors entirely. He deliberately nosed down, toward the bottom of the hill. Then he pulled up, just in time, and the ship was literally climbing up the side of the hill, three feet above the ground. Just before it reached the crest of the hill, where the top flattened

out, he felt the hovering of the huge craft, and pulled back still farther. The ship hit on three points and the next second had surmounted the top, its speed perceptibly slowed, and was rolling along the flat strip of wet grass.

For a moment it rolled straight ahead, and then as the dropping speed made the rudders ineffective, it veered to the right. The wings already projected over the sides of the hill. In desperation Russ shoved on the right-hand throttle. The propeller spun rapidly, and pulled the ship to the left just as the right wheel started over the brink. For five seconds it was tight work to keep the ship on its narrow path. Then it came to a stop, a few yards from the end of the field and another slope.

Russ ran out the motors and then cut the switches. He leaned back in the seat, for the moment utterly exhausted.

"Well, I thought we were looking St. Peter right in the face when we made that landing," announced Jennings. "My face hurts! Nice work, Russ. Wonder what part of the country we might be in?"

Russ threw back his head and laughed.

"Wouldn't it be a joke if we were in the middle of Cass County?" he chuckled, and then became serious. "You know what those outlaws said; according to the papers. Any flyer that falls into their hands will get paid back for those bombs——"

"That's a thought, too," admitted Jimmy. "Well, in a little while we'll know. Last thing I saw when I

was getting ready to get killed was some cars starting in our direction. Here comes a sad-looking hombre, followed by his whole family, to look us over. Maybe we'd better step slow and easy until we find out where we are, eh?"

Russ nodded and then the flyers climbed down to the ground. A tall, gaunt, drooping-moustached man in overalls and hickory shirt was coming toward them, followed by a stoop-shouldered woman and three children. A nondescript cabin clung to the side of the next hill, in the middle of a ragged clearing.

"As soon as we can get a ride to town, we'll have to report that wreck, and where we are," said Russ absently. "We can't take off from here until the ground dries out. It was pretty tough luck for those two fellows, Jimmy. Controls went bad, I suppose."

Jennings nodded silently, and for a moment the two airmen were silent. Again there was that curious expression of bleak, inarticulate age on their battered faces as they thought of the two men who had been added to the dozens of their friends who had "gone west" in the process of conquering the air. Then, as is the creed of the flyer, they dismissed it from their minds. One cannot muse on death too much if one is to keep the nerve intact.

The mountaineer was close to them now, having outstripped his ragged family by several hundred yards. He hung about at the bottom of the hill, as

though afraid to come closer. Russ and Jennings walked toward him, and there was what amounted to an expression of fear on the man's thin, wrinkled face.

"I cal'lated yuh'd be comin' intuh Wrayville soon," he greeted them ingratiatingly, and smiled a toothless smile that was meant to be friendly. There was something curiously servile about it, as though he were a dog crawling before a man he feared.

"Sort of tough storm," returned Jennings, and Russ looked up Wrayville on his map. In a few seconds his face split in a wide grin. Without quite knowing why, he lowered his voice as he spoke to Jennings.

"Jimmy, we're not ten miles from the eastern boundary of Cass County! What do you know about that?"

Jennings whistled, and then his brown eyes sparkled with that unquenchable spirit which was a part of him.

"We'll be just a little more popular here than we would be right in the middle of the war," he grinned. "All this country is pretty sympathetic with the outlaws, you know. The miners, that is. This washed-out bozo here 'cal'lated' we'd be here, too. Do you suppose——"

He stopped as the noise of a speeding motor car, which had been vaguely audible, suddenly increased. Apparently there were several cars. They clattered and tinkled and roared along, the cutout wide open. Two flivvers raced up the road, and stopped opposite

the field. There were other cars behind them. Ten or a dozen roughly dressed men piled out, and streamed across the field toward the ship. Russ, idly tinkering with the flap of his Colt holster, saw that most of them were foreigners, and probably miners who had been in town for a Saturday afternoon holiday. Half of them had been drinking, if their red faces and loud voices were any criterion.

"Nice looking bunch of eggs," he commented to Jennings.

They waited silently while the crowd approached. Two other cars drew up at the edge of the field. As the miners came closer their voices dropped, and they walked slower and slower. Then they stopped altogether, and a tremendously tall man seemed to be talking to them. He cast a few unpleasantly sneering looks at the waiting airmen as he talked.

He had a remarkable face, and seemed to be a leader. He was fully six feet in height, and built like a Hercules. He was dressed in a white silk shirt, spotted blue trousers, and bright tan shoes. His thick black hair was a bushy, ungovernable mane. His eyes were large and black, and a tremendous hook nose jutted forth from his face over a wide and very thin mouth. Although apparently a young man not over thirty-five, there were deep, bitter lines in his face that gave it an air of wild strength. Now his eyes were flashing, and his face was fierce and eager. His words, indistinguishable to Russ, came in a veritable torrent.

Car after car drew up and discharged its cargo of nondescript miners, and then larger and more expensive vehicles brought passengers who looked like townspeople and their wives. For some reason, though, Russ watched the first knot of men.

Suddenly they started for the ship in a straggling group. In their dark faces there was a curious mixture of fear and hate as they looked at the army men. Without a word having been spoken, there was unmistakable tension in the air. The leader strode ahead confidently.

They stopped alongside the ship, on the opposite side of it from where Russ and Jennings were standing. The flyers strolled around the front to keep an eye on them. There were mutters of wonderment from the group of miners as they got close enough to comprehend the hugeness of the Martin towering above them. Thirty or forty other people, mostly miners, were now gathered thirty yards away, and there were more coming. Russ was atingle with the consciousness of that subtle antagonism in the air. All these people were acting in a very strange manner—half-afraid, half-resentful——

As though they had received a silent command, the original group started walking around the tail of the ship, and very close to it. One man put a heavy stained boot on one of the wires.

"Keep back, please," said Russ casually. "And don't touch it. There's two thousand pounds of bombs on that ship, so don't fool with it."

For a second there was utter silence, and the eyes of the leader began to leap and glow strangely. There were a few muttered words in some foreign tongue.

The leader was standing five feet away from the tail. He started to turn his back to the ship, apparently, and seemed to lose his balance. He staggered a step toward the ship, as though he had tripped. Then he fell toward it, and one arm flayed out toward a rudder, in what seemed like an attempt to save himself from falling. His ham-like hand was knotted into a fist, and it crashed through one of the big rudders with terrific power. There was the grind and crashing of breaking wood and tearing canvas. His other hand caught at the rudder, and as the weight of his body came into play it seemed that the rudder would be torn off.

Something snapped in Farrell's brain, and without the loss of a split second he leaped forward, followed closely by Jennings. There was something distinctly off color about the way that man had tripped and fallen, and sent his fist through the rudder. It was a deliberate attempt to disable the ship.

The exultant satisfaction mirrored on the faces of the miners was wiped off abruptly as the big flyer bounded forward. The whole group fell back a trifle. The tall man was trying to disengage himself from the wreck of the rudder.

Russ got him by the neck, and with a terrific heave of his powerful shoulders tore him loose and flung him back. As though in instinctive reaction, the

miner, smiling a bit although his eyes were murderous, caught his balance as he doubled his fists. Farrell's fists thudded home to the man's jaw, but the miner did not go down. He staggered a trifle, and the smile was wiped off his face. If ever the wrathful young flyer had seen maniacal rage peering forth from a man's face, it was then.

"Stand back, or I'll drill you!" snapped Jennings, Colt in hand. The next second Russ had his own gun out, and they were covering the cowering group with gun muzzles that wavered back and forth. The leader fell back a step, and there was sudden fear in his eyes. Russ took a step forward, and before the blaze in his eyes the whole company seemed paralyzed with fear. The rapidly growing crowd was silent, watching.

"Get off this field, and the first time you set foot beyond the fence on any side you'll get filled so full of lead you'll weigh three pounds more than your automobile," snarled Russ.

Entirely aside from the fury which consumed him, like a separate entity, there was a curiously cool and straight-thinking Russ Farrell which was now ordering his actions. He seemed to grasp the situation instinctively, and, putting all that had happened together, to automatically lay out a plan of campaign.

For a few seconds his gigantic opponent did not move. He seemed dazed.

"Move!" blazed Russ, and the next second the crack of a shot sounded through the stillness. He

had shot into the air, because he knew that he must rule from the start. He and Jennings were in the midst of their enemies.

The effect of the shot was almost ludicrous. The dozen men turned and ran like mad. When they reached the fence they climbed into their cars and chugged away. The last impression Russ had of them was that of a cruel, tight-lipped face peering from behind a steering wheel.

"There's one cinch, Jimmy," stated Russ in low tones. "About three quarters of these hunyacks are against us. They sympathize with the outlaws, even if they're not with 'em. That was a deliberate attempt to put the ship out of commission, and a lot of those other birds are looking at us in a highly unpleasant manner."

"Right-o," said Jimmy blithely. "There's a couple of things that may be in our favor, at that. Remember what this mountaineer bird said? Something about expecting us? And we've got this crowd buffaloed, temporarily. Do you suppose they figure we landed on purpose? Started out from Langham for the town of Wrayville, for instance? Anyway, the Federal army carries a lot of weight in the backwoods——"

An impassioned voice on the edge of the crowd was raised suddenly in what was apparently a violent denunciation. As the pilots watched, they saw the squat, unshaven miner who was talking point at them. He spat viciously in their direction, and then

turned to resume his torrent of words. He was one of a group of four men.

As Russ watched he saw a sinewy young fellow who looked like a Swede place a big hand in front of the speaker's mouth. He spoke in fairly good English:

"Shut up, Tony! You're talking treason——"

The shorter man's right foot lashed out and caught the speaker a terrific kick in the shin. The Swede went down, his face writhing in pain. His opponent leaped on the man's prostrate form, and kicked and stamped it in a paroxysm of rage.

There was but a sprinkling of men who were not miners, and they were standing a considerable distance away from the battle. Some of them started forward, but the main body of miners, who had been milling uneasily ever since the struggle between Russ and one of their number, simply looked on and seemed to be enjoying it. Guttural words seemed to be an encouragement to the rabid fighter to finish his man.

It took about three seconds for Russ to reach the scene. Just before he got to the man called Tony his comrades tried to warn him, but Tony, his face dark with passion, did not heed them. He was a lunatic as he methodically tortured the weakly struggling Swede. In the split second when Russ was reaching for his man the prostrate victim of the miner's beating raised his head as he attempted to get up, and the Italian's foot caught him a terrific blow on the side of the head, laying it open in a two-inch gash.

Russ was literally beside himself at the sight, and seemed possessed of superhuman strength. He got to the miner an instant before Jennings, and lifted him bodily. He raised him above his head, and threw him to the ground. He was subconsciously aware that some men were running toward him, that women were shrieking, and that Tony's friends were surging forward. Then he heard Jimmy Jennings snap out a sharp command, and heard a shot. The next second Tony was on his feet, just in time to get Farrell's fist squarely in the nose.

"Stand back!" roared Jennings, his gun ready. There was breathless silence, and not a person moved for the next two minutes. A hundred people watched while Russ gave the miner a terrible beating.

Tony was built like a gorilla, with tremendous shoulders and long, powerful arms, but he never had a chance to use his muscular equipment. No sooner would he get to his feet than Farrell's smashing blows laid him flat again. After four knockdowns his knees were buckling under him. Russ, like some avenging force which could not be stopped or curbed, fought with a wild abandon.

In a few seconds short of a minute the miner was a bloody, unconscious heap on the ground.

"Thanks—a—Lieutenant, sir," gasped a weak voice, and Russ looked down at the maimed Swede whose battle he had been fighting. The man was smiling a pathetic, twisted smile, although his face was white with pain. His puffed blue eyes held a

twinkle despite his condition. Suddenly all Farrell's fury left him, and he took a long breath.

A murmur of conversation rose from the ground, interspersed with a few sobs from the women.

"Well, you ham-swinging amateur, that was pretty," grinned Jimmy, still keeping a wary eye on the sullen-faced miners. "I thought I saw at least six fists coming from your side, and I'll bet the wop saw a thousand. I——"

"Congratulations, Lieutenant. And we're sorry that your introduction to Wrayville should be of such a character."

Russ, breathing deeply, turned to look into the brown eyes of a stocky, pleasant-faced man of about thirty-five.

"Indeed, yes," nodded a gray-haired, portly man in an unpressed gray suit. Three other men, plainly townspeople, gathered around the flyers.

"We are delighted that you are here, Lieutenant," said the gray-haired man earnestly. "Wrayville needs you. Naturally every one has taken sides in this war—and it is regrettable that a great majority of the miners around here sympathize with the rebels. In this respect Wrayville is unusual, because, as you probably know, the union, and the best element of the miners, which means the majority all over the state, are rabid against this handful of lawbreakers who are fomenting civil war. I think that the situation in Wrayville is due to the fact that our mining class is way below the average, and that, in the per-

son of Garissi, we have in our district an agitator and leader of such unusual personality and power that he can keep the men lashed into a frenzy."

He had lowered his voice, and looked uneasily toward the crowd as he spoke. Then he went on:

"Before I say anything else, I want to bring this before you. I am chairman of the committee in charge of the Kane County Fair, which is scheduled to start Monday. We would like to have your permission to hold the fair. We believe we can run it in an orderly manner, and that diversion of that nature will take the men's minds off this struggle, to some extent, and perhaps be the means of preventing any more riots such as have been taking place. This section is a powder magazine with a match near the fuse. It would take but little to have hundreds of the most ignorant miners—we have the lowest grade here—throw discretion to the winds and join the rebels."

He wiped his forehead with a huge handkerchief, and looked anxiously at Russ. Farrell was silent for a moment, but his mind was racing. Suddenly everything was clear to him. What the mountaineer had said when they first arrived, the unmistakable fear and respect shown by the miners when confronted with a direct command from the flyers, and the things just uttered by the Wrayville man. The town was but a few miles outside of Cass County, and just beneath the surface the miners were seething in Wrayville as they were in parts of Cass County. Martial

law had been in effect in Cass County—these people supposed that he and Jimmy had landed at Wrayville purposely, and that they were to run the town and maintain order. They took it for granted that martial law had been extended.

He flashed a look at Jimmy, and then said solemnly:

"Will you pardon us while we talk privately a moment—Lieutenant Jennings and I?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly," said the portly man, and Russ and Jennings, who was barely able to restrain his mirth, retired to a distance.

"Jimmy, these people think we're here to run the town," grinned Russ.

Jennings chuckled.

"Isn't that a hot one? We're bound to be here for a couple of days—the field can't dry before then——"

"Here's the point!" Russ went on seriously. "You see what the proposition is, Jim, and we've got what that fair man said to back it up. Seventy per cent. of the people here hate us because we're fighting the outlaws. They didn't wait ten minutes before they tried—and succeeded slightly—to disable the ship. That fight shows how ready they are to go wild—I have no doubt that the young Swede was standing up for us while Tony was bawling us out so bad.

"What I'm thinking of is this. If they'll go that far, we're liable to run into a whole mess of trouble. Some of these wild miners'd love to pop us off, destroy

a forty-thousand-dollar ship and a ton of bombs that have got to get to Charleston——"

"Pardon me, Lieutenant," came the voice of the pleasant-faced young man who had talked to Russ before. He walked closer, and went on: "I hate to butt in, but possibly I can be of some assistance and give you some dope that no one else can. My name is Hillyer—I'm head of a lumber company, and I live here part of the year. I was in France—Captain of Infantry."

The flyers introduced themselves, and then Russ said:

"We seem to have dropped into a hornet's nest. Anything you can tell us will surely help."

"That old fellow you were talking to is cashier of the town bank and chairman of the fair committee, as he said. What he told you about the line-up is right. Here's what you want to know. No question about it that the better element—storekeepers, etc. —are absolutely out of sympathy with the outlaws over there in Cass County. Most of the miners here are either openly or secretly in sympathy with that army. This town lives off the miners—they supply all the business. Likewise, the town business men are a very small minority of the people in Kane County, and particularly this section. So, whatever they may feel I can't say that you can depend on them for any open help. They'll be afraid it will ruin their business, maybe get them beaten up by some wild gang, etc. They've got to live here from

now on, you know, so they aren't coming into the open, but are keeping their mouths shut. Me—I've got my lumberjacks and my business, don't give a hoot whether there's a mine or a miner within a hundred miles of here, so I can't take credit for lining up openly against the outlaws. My lumberjacks beat up a mess of miners the other night for threatening to get me because I left no doubt where I stood.

"Same way with the law, I'm afraid. The sheriff wants votes, and his deputies are scared. It's tough to go against seventy per cent. of the men of your district—and tough, wild hombres being stirred up by a few radical agitators. You understand that the union itself and labor all over the country are absolutely against this civil war that's started—— It's just a few wild men throwing aside all principles, breaking every law, and reverting to the olden times.

"I'm afraid, gentlemen, that you'll have to play a lone hand, and you'll have to give orders, not make requests, even to the sheriff."

"I see," nodded Russ, and Jimmy said significantly:

"We'll have to rule with an iron hand, Russ."

"Martial law will have scared them, I believe, as far as you personally are concerned," Hillyer went on. "But watch your ship. That fellow Garissi, who was up here and I hear made that hole in your rudder, is almost a genius, and not afraid of man or devil. He's been a thorn in the side of the operators for a long time. He holds the men in the hollow of his

hand. Don't work in the mines himself. I think he's a radical agitator. Several groups of men are leaving here every night to join the outlaws. I've heard some rumors, at fourth hand, from my men about Garissi planning to lead something like three hundred men, all armed, to the aid of the rebels as soon as some smuggled ammunition gets here. May be all bunk——"

"Doesn't seem natural that he'd hang around unless he was doing something for the cause," remarked Russ.

"Exactly. Now anything I can do——"

"Excuse me. This chap wants to say something to me, I guess," Russ interrupted. The young Swede was hanging around by himself, thirty feet away, as though anxious to come closer without daring to. At Farrell's invitation he came up diffidently, limping badly. He had a handkerchief around his head.

"I ban grateful, sir," he stammered. "I——"

"That's all right. What was it about?"

In halting words the powerful young miner told them. Tony had said that he hoped the bombs would go off and blow the flyers up and the whole United States Army with them, including most of the rottenest country in the world—the United States. The Swede had interposed here, because:

"I ban soldier in the war one time!" he said proudly.

Jennings mutely held out his hand, and shook

hands. Russ gazed at the towering Swede appreciatively. Wrayville had more than its share of the minority of aliens who hurt—sometimes hate—America, but here was a specimen of the great majority of immigrants who loved their adopted country.

In a few seconds a new idea had taken hold in Farrell's mind, and a plan sprang into being. The duty of himself and Jimmy Jennings was to do all in their power to help put down the lawless, bloody uprising. So long as they were in Wrayville, theirs was the responsibility of doing all that could be done to that end. And three hundred recruits with extra artillery and ammunition would mean weeks of fighting, dozens more dead——

"Listen," the flyer said tersely. "You're a real American. You're not in sympathy with these outlaws. Would you be a spy for us? Will you make peace with those fellows, apparently fall in with their ideas, and then report to me if they do anything to help that ragged army out in the woods?"

Hillyer nodded his approval, and Jimmy Jennings grinned beatifically. The Swede hesitated, and then agreed. At present he knew nothing definite—every night small groups left work and went to join their friends, but nothing big was on foot as far as he knew. The time and place of reporting was agreed upon, and to further the plot, with the crowd looking on, Russ apparently got angry with the Swede, and ordered him away in a loud voice, hand on gun.

The man, whose name was Carlson, stumbled away, casting menacing looks backward.

A half-hour later Russ started for town to report to Charleston and see the sheriff. Jennings stayed to guard the ship. Russ had only a moment for conversation with Jimmy in private. What he said was:

"We won't say we've been ordered here, or that martial law is in effect. They've handed it to us—we'll accept it, to save our own skins, to help save the ship, and so forth. Without that prestige there's no one in town would dare lift a hand to help us. As two army men we're just lambs among the wolves, with a ship that they'd like to destroy to keep it—and the bombs, mainly—from blowing their outlaw friends into small pieces. We've got to keep on as we started—never let 'em get a start on us."

"Right you are!" admitted Jennings blithely.

He watched Russ striding toward the waiting car, where Hillyer was already at the wheel. There were nearly a hundred miners around, now, and there was menace in their dark eyes and rough faces as they watched the tall young pilot leave. Jimmy thought back a year to the time when Russ had hit the border, a raw recruit on the border patrol who could fly like a demon. Russ had gone far since then—— There was a sureness and self-confidence about him which, allied with the type of mind that recognizes no obstacles in the performance of duty, made him a natural leader. Jennings, an ace in the war, one of

the stars of the border patrol, suddenly realized that there was no man whom he would rather have by his side in the struggle which he instinctively sensed was just starting against almost overwhelming odds.

A half-hour later, in a booth in the telephone office, Russ had made his report to C. O. at Charleston and was listening to his orders.

"Ship the bombs on the ten fifteen in the morning," the major said tersely. "Take off as soon as you think you can do it safely, providing the matter of the new recruits for the outlaws does not come to a head. Listen, Farrell. I'm reposing great confidence in you. You and Jennings use your own judgment. Stop that business if there's a way to do it. Be sure you're right before you go ahead, but then don't let the red tape tie you up. Our business is to stop this little war, and I'll be responsible for what you do. Fresh ammunition and a couple of hundred men will mean that we've got to bomb them—a good many lives lost. Those bombs must get here—they'll know then we mean business. Report to me daily, or oftener if necessary. That's all, Farrell."

As they started for the sheriff's office Russ was aware of his own pleasant state of taut expectancy. To one of his temperament, the task ahead was one of attractive possibilities and danger. Even in the atmosphere of hostility which surrounded him there was something which called to the adventurer in him, and made him tingle to meet it. Fear, unwilling respect, almost open threats—those were his

portion on the main street of Wrayville. When he had ordered the gas for the ship the garage man had been uneasy. There seemed to be a state of armed neutrality in the town, and the many miners who thronged the street, arrayed in their best, talked in low tones and looked volumes. Every one was on edge—wrought up to a dangerous pitch. And it was not hard to see that radicals were in the majority —and that those who would oppose them did not dare do it openly. Three times insulting and threatening remarks were thrown at Hillyer and Russ as they walked down the street, but they came from the middle of some group and the culprit could not be definitely spotted. A policeman in uniform sweat profusely and did not dare to call his soul his own. Curious looks from every window followed them.

"Some situation, isn't it?" remarked Hillyer. "But then, I suppose you fellows run into excitement pretty often, at that. Gorry, how I envy you! I'd have given a leg to keep my commission in the army——"

"Why didn't you?" asked Russ.

"Dad's been sick, so it was up to me to come back to the hills and go to work," Hillyer replied simply.

Suddenly Farrell's enjoyment of the situation was blotted out by a quick strengthening of the feeling which had been subconsciously bothering him ever since he had received that letter from home. He was doing his duty as an army man—but perhaps there was a higher duty calling him. Back in Bluefield his

father needed him, and his mother was living in dread——

"Here's the sheriff's office," said Hillyer.

The sheriff was a very small man with a weazened face, a discouraged moustache, and watery gray eyes. He looked worried, and sprang to his feet as they came in. A deputy was lounging in a chair, and he also got up with alacrity.

"Lieutenant Farrell of the United States Army Service, Sheriff Dixon," Hillyer introduced them.

Russ began to play his part immediately.

"I want six deputies to work in two twelve-hour shifts, guarding my ship," he said crisply. "There has already been an attempt, nearly successful, to cripple it. You are more familiar with conditions here than I. Perhaps we can work together to keep down trouble."

The sheriff stroked his long chin nervously, hemmed and hawed, and walked up and down his office.

"Lieutenant, I don't rightly know where I could get any men short of a day or two that'd want tuh buck a mob," he said finally. He was apologetic.

Russ was prepared for apologies, but not for so definite a statement.

"You mean that your deputies would refuse to guard it—that they'd go against their oath——"

"Yuh see, I'd have to get new men and swear 'em in," explained the sheriff. "I couldn't git 'em—not men that'd do nothin'. I expect yuh should have

brought yore own troops, Lieutenant. Honest, yuh ought to guard it yourself. I'll do anything I can, but I'm just tellin' yuh."

For the next three minutes Russ, as an idea formed in his mind, tried to persuade the sheriff that it would be better if he would assign deputies to guard the ship. It became more and more plain that the sheriff, for political or other reasons, did not want to put a finger in the pie. It grew to be a certainty to the flyer that unless the sheriff, also, had believed that martial law was declared in Wrayville it would have taken him but a few seconds to refuse forthright. As it was, he did not dare do that, but tried to evade responsibility.

Farrell's brain was working smoothly and efficiently behind his camouflage of persuation. Garissi was the key to the Wrayville problem—his remarkable leadership had inflamed his followers, according to all indications, and made Wrayville unique in its whole-hearted support of the outlaw cause. If Garissi could be spirited out of the situation, the leaderless radicals would be more or less at a loss. And Russ had a plan that was worth trying. So he rose, and playing his rôle of dictator for all it was worth, said:

"I've got a lot to do, Sheriff, and I can't take any more time here. I appreciate your suggestions about the situation. Nevertheless, I am putting it up to you to guard forty thousand dollars' worth of vitally important government property. Have the three deputies for the night shift, from six to six, at the field

in plenty of time to go on, and fully armed. Have three more to relieve them in the morning. I'm glad to have met you—we must work together. Good afternoon, sir!"

They left the sheriff standing motionless alongside the desk. He had nodded once, unenthusiastically.

"I told you," said Hillyer. "Lieutenant, those deputies will just lay down to any mob. I——"

"I expect that," stated Russ. "But listen."

Hillyer heard his plan, and grinned admiringly. Later Jimmy Jennings, the center of at least three hundred onlookers who were spread in a wide ring a safe distance from the ship, heard it, too, and did a little jig of joy. Later he went to town with Hillyer to arrange for sleeping quarters. Russ, at five o'clock, ordered everybody to leave the field. The hundreds of people obeyed without a murmur. Farrell gave the order with smiling courtesy, which did not antagonize them. But there was no doubt in any one's mind that he meant what he said. When he was certain that he was unobserved, he quickly detached the double-Lewis machine gun on the back-cockpit, and hid it in some bushes in a place he had previously spotted. Just before the arrival of the deputies, at six, Jennings returned with Hillyer, and told Russ gleefully how the Mayor, a dentist, had consulted with him for an hour about the issuing of any necessary proclamations, such as an order instructing every one to be off the streets by ten o'clock, and other matters.

"I sat tight, acted wise, and finally told him we'd do nothing definite until something happened which required strong measures," chuckled Jimmy. "Boy, all those people are walking on eggs and waiting for an explosion. They're scared stiff to call their souls their own, for fear a mob'll string 'em up to a tree or something. The only competition we've got as rulers is Garissi. The mayor and everybody else were so tickled to hand over the running of this town to us that it's no wonder they didn't wait for us to announce ourselves!"

The deputies who arrived were sullen and silent. It was apparent that they were very unwilling, and at least two of them were badly scared. One was a little fellow who looked like a clerk, and the other a red-cheeked farm boy. The third was a hulking, black-bearded man who looked as though he might be a miner.

"Best I could do," stated the sheriff morosely. "Wish I could stay myself, but I got tuh stick tuh the office. No tellin' what'll pop any minute."

He hastened away in his Ford, as though anxious to put as much distance between himself and his supposed chieftains as possible.

"Keep your eyes open, and shoot unless you hear one of our voices from the road," instructed Russ. "Challenge at the fence, and unless it's one of us, don't let 'em come farther. We'll have it announced in town that no one is to enter this field at night."

"Hain't—hain't yuh-all gonna stay with us?"

asked the man who looked like a clerk, and there was something piteous in his face and voice.

"We've got to sleep sometime," returned Russ, and thought he saw a sudden glow in the black-bearded man's opaque dark eyes.

At nine that night two dark forms let themselves out of the window of a bedroom in Mrs. Sykes' boarding house, and slipped through the backyard and into a lane which led past some farms to the edge of a hill. They seemed anxious to avoid detection, and succeeded. There was not a sound nor a living thing near them as they crept down the lane to the sparsely wooded slope which marked the edge of town. They laid on their bellies, and crawled up the slope, for there were houses at its foot. When they had surmounted the crest and were going down the other side Russ Farrell spoke for the first time.

"That watchman out in front of the house'll have a long wait!" he chuckled. "At that, Jim, it means that Garissi is smart—and that we've figured right."

"I hope we're not too late," returned Jennings. "Can't believe we are, though. Say, who'd have thought that they'd post a shadower to follow us around? Lucky thing you spotted him, Russ, or whatever chance we have to get the goods on Garissi would be gone. Hillyer meets us about at the bend, does he?"

"Uh, huh."

By devious routes they finally got on the road leading past the field, which was about half a mile from the place they joined it. At the bend, a few hundred yards from the field, Hillyer rose up from some bushes and hailed them.

"Not a thing passed by," he reported. "All's quiet along the Potomac. Let's hustle, and get into the bushes before the moon comes up."

As they worked their way cautiously through the bushes, Russ was turning over the details of his plan, trying to find a flaw. It was simplicity itself. He had figured it a certainty that Garissi would use every means he could to put the ship out of order, and also, probably, get hold of the bombs. He would naturally deem it as great a service as he could do for his comrades to make way with the equipment which was enough in itself to kill them all if turned loose against them. Wrayville was so close to Charleston that a twenty-minute trip would be all that was necessary to deliver the bombs there, and another twenty minutes would find the ship and the supposed wielders of martial law back in town again. If he figured that the bombs were for use in case of emergencies right in Wrayville, he would have the same motive, to a lesser degree, in making way with them.

Russ had likewise come to the conclusion that if he and Jimmy were known to be guarding the ship, the prestige of their supposed position might be sufficient to make Garissi pause. So he had arranged that the radical leader believe that only three

scared deputies were guarding it. Reports from Cass County would have been sufficient to inform the most ignorant what martial law meant, and how pitilessly any resistance would be punished.

By drawing Garissi into the trap of attacking the ship, it should be possible to capture him, jail him and his principal followers for definite and serious cause, and thereby remove the principal factor in Wrayville's disorders, and probably save the Federal troops in Cass County a lot of trouble. Leaderless, the miners would not be so likely to form an army to join their mates, and without the stimulus of the fiery Garissi it was possible that conditions would quiet down to normal, or nearly so.

Suddenly Russ threw back his head and laughed.

"What dumbells *we* are!" he told his companions. "What good is our machine gun going to do us if Garissi thinks fast enough to figure that we can't shoot with the deputies down there by the ship, too! We've got to get them over with us, instead of using them as bait up to the last minute!"

A moment's reflection convinced everybody of the truth of this. If Russ had any inclination to pat himself on the back for the way he had handled things thus far, it was all gone as he thought of how near a fiasco he had come.

"A brainy young man *I* am!" he jeered himself.

They ceased their stealthy progress, and came out on the field. There was no challenge at all. They walked boldly up the slope toward the ship. They

were within twenty feet of it before a big form rose from the ground. Russ, utterly amazed at the total silence up to this time, announced who they were before the challenge came. The other two guards scrambled to their feet. They had evidently been asleep.

"Fine guards you are!" said Jimmy disgustedly. "A boiler factory could have been set up within ten feet of you."

Russ explained the plan quickly to them, wasting no time on fruitless expostulations against their neglect of duty. The relief of two of them was almost ludicrous, but the black-bearded man said nothing. Russ looked at him sharply. Something in his attitude when they had announced that afternoon that the deputies were to guard alone had seemed to indicate satisfaction, and now it appeared that the man was disappointed. He might be a spy, placed deliberately by Garissi.

They took up their positions at the foot of the hill, in the shelter of the bushes, and waited. Russ was thinking of home, despite himself. Something in Hillyer's unassuming words a few hours before had been working on his mind—and for the first time in his army career Russ was not entirely happy in meeting a dangerous situation.

It was after midnight when there came the noise of an automobile motor from the road.

"It's a truck!" Russ whispered to his companion. Hillyer nodded.

Abruptly the black-bearded man got to his feet. He started pacing up and down.

"Sit down!" ordered Russ sharply. "Now's the time to keep quiet——"

In answer, the deputy, who was near a thick growth of young saplings, suddenly leaped behind them. The next second he was crashing through the bush.

Jimmy Jennings was after him like a shot, and Jimmy could run. Russ, sick for fear there would be a shot or some other noise sufficient to warn the oncoming truck, waited as calmly as he could. There was a brief increase in the noise—then quiet. As the truck stopped down by the road, Jimmy came creeping back.

"Pretty!" he panted. "Tackled him from behind, threw him, and he hit his head on a tree and knocked himself out. He's tied up in my pistol belt and leather belt now. Look at that mob!"

A dozen men had climbed off the truck, and the towering form of Garissi was easily picked out in the moonlight. They ascended the slope from the road, boldly, and walked across the field toward the ship. The two flyers, the deputies, and Hillyer were at the foot of the slope, directly opposite the ship.

"They're not scared—depended on old Whiskers," whispered Jimmy. "They'll take warning when nobody is there——"

"Or figure Whiskers got the two others to leave," returned Russ. "Get the gun ready, and we'll see."

There was a short consultation up on the hill, but

apparently Farrell's diagnosis had been correct. They fell to work, and in a short time a line of men were carrying two bombs apiece across the field to the truck.

"We've got to load 'em anyhow to-morrow—let 'em get it done for us!" chuckled Jimmy. "Wait till they're nearly through——"

"Nobody left on the truck, is there?" asked Hillyer.

"No."

When it seemed that most of the bombs must be gone, Russ gave the word to be ready. They waited until the carriers had returned for another load, and were gathered around the ship. Then Farrell's voice rang out sharp and clear in the quiet night air.

"Don't move, or you'll be riddled with bullets! Listen to this—you won't get hurt!"

The wicked rat-a-tat-tat of the two guns rang out. The outlaws stood rooted in their tracks. Russ, circling to keep out of range of the bullets should it be necessary to shoot, ran up the hill toward them.

"One move and you're all gone—you're covered!" he kept warning them, and they did not chance it. He stopped several feet to one side of the ship.

"Garissi! Hands in the air, and come toward me slowly."

There were a few seconds of utter silence. Garissi did not move, nor did his followers. They were unarmed, having stacked their rifles to one side while they worked. Nevertheless, for a moment Russ felt

that success or failure hung in the balance. It seemed that the machine gun must rake through the ranks of the outlaws—and then the towering leader moved slowly forward.

Russ stopped him as he came within ten feet. The man's strong, hawklike, curiously untamed face was the mirror of a thousand conflicting emotions, seemingly, and even in the darkness the wild glare of his eyes could be seen.

"The rest of you—walk down the slope, toward the gun. Move fast—by the time I count five the gun will start shooting!"

Russ was shouting, in order that Hillyer and Jennings should be prepared. The group of men started down the slope slowly. Garissi and Russ followed. The leader said not a word as he was bound securely, and then watched his followers tied. Every sort of thing was used for the bonds, mostly the captives' own clothing. Their hands were secured behind their backs, and their ankles tied tightly.

The task was nearly finished when there came the noise of a man crashing through the bushes. He staggered out on the field, and ran toward the group of men. In answer to Hillyer's sharp challenge he gasped "Carlson!"

He could scarcely tell his story for lack of breath. He had sought for the flyers at their boarding house, and finally come out to the field as a last resort. Between two hundred and fifty and three hundred miners had already started for Cass County, march-

ing, and expected to make it by morning. Garissi and the other captives were to follow in the truck, after disabling the ship and getting the bombs.

Russ did not stop to ask for details, but appealed to Hillyer.

"How did they go?" he asked quickly.

"Only one road—enters Cass County ten miles south of Charleston. Deserted all the way—couple of little settlements. Called the Newton Pike. But——"

"This field is drier than I figured it would be this afternoon," Russ said slowly, as though thinking aloud. "I——"

"The slopes drain it fast," Jennings interjected quietly.

"I'm going to take off, get to Charleston, get some men from the field with machine guns from the ships stationed at that road——"

"You're crazy, Russ!" snapped Jennings.

Russ was perhaps crazy at that moment—and yet he was a master-flyer, particularly on big ships, and his instinct told him there was a chance. The quality which had been responsible for most of his best-known exploits in the service—a fiery, single-minded devotion to duty which brooked no obstacles—consumed him now as this new and most serious emergency confronted him. He was a man of one idea.

He brushed their objections aside, and such was the fury of his spirit that neither Jennings nor Hillyer opposed him. In three minutes both Libertys were idling.

Turning any ship but the twin-motored Martin on that narrow hilltop would have been impossible, but with the right-hand motor wide open the ship turned to the left, and there was power enough to drag the outside wheel up the slope again after it had dropped over and it seemed the ship would plunge down the hillside. Jennings yelled to him:

"That rudder, Russ! It might not be enough——"

"The other one'll handle it, anyway, in a pinch!" bellowed Russ, and gave his ship the gun.

Never in his flying career had he ever experienced the wild thrill of that swift ride across the hilltop, with the moonlight gleaming silver on the dewy grass and the mountains looming blackly ahead. It was a gamble whether the ship would get off the wet ground, or, without flying speed, plunge down the steep slope and smash head on into the trees. And turning off the power if he felt he could not make it would do no good —it would roll on over, anyway.

With the Libertys roaring along smoothly, the huge ship sped on its way. Came the moment when his heart stopped—the edge of the slope. Would it go down—or take the air?

It did a little of both. It took the air, then dropped a trifle. Instantly he did the only thing—nosed down, got flying speed, held the ship level for excess speed, and then dared all in a wild zoom. The tremendous Goliath of the air barely cleared the treetops. But he was in the air.

Round and round he circled between the moun-

tains, and had no time to watch lights spring into being down in Wrayville and excited people rush out on the streets to watch. His exhausts were sending forth streamers of flame as he circled upward until the mountain tops were below him. Then, straight as a string northward, the ship thundered across the peaks and was lost to Wrayville's sight.

Shortly the river came in sight, a silver ribbon deep between the mountains. He turned westward to follow it, and shoved both throttles wide open. The moonlight gilded the peaks of the mountains, but between them deep-cut gorges were masses of mysterious shadow above which the Martin roared along like some gigantic monster of the night. A flaw in the motors meant sure death during that breathless, ten-minute rush across the mountains, and well Russ knew it as he crouched behind the wheel, leaning forward as though to help his giant craft on its way.

He drew a deep breath of relief as he saw the lights of Charleston spread beneath him like a section of fairyland. The field was plain in the moonlight, alongside the river. The tents where the mechanics slept were in regular lines, and many DeHavilands bulked vaguely on the line. He watched the men tumble forth like ghosts in their night-clothes, and as he started down automobile headlights snapped on to aid his difficult landing as much as possible.

It was tight work, that landing, for distances are hard to estimate and a Martin is not easy to handle at night. Russ, like a flea on an elephant's back, rode

his huge craft down in great circles, and all his years of flying contributed to the uncanny judgment which was responsible for the bomber's skimming smoothly to the shadowed ground.

The Major was at the head of the excited, wondering swarm of undressed men who gathered around the ship. Russ cut the motors quickly, and told his story in three sentences:

"Those three hundred men are marching along the Newton Pike, which enters Cass County ten miles south of here. I thought the mechanics with machine guns from the ship could stop 'em. We've got about three hours to make it."

The Major was an old soldier, and his orders flew thick and fast. The flyers having scouted all over Cass County knew the location of the deserted road, and likewise a meandering trail leading to it. In half an hour forty mechanics, armed with Colts and fifteen machine guns, were on their way, the Major at their head. Russ tumbled into Pop Cravath's bed and slept.

During the next day all the news came in. The small army had walked into a trap of machine guns placed on the mountainsides above the road, and had surrendered without a struggle. They had been disarmed, and marched home under guard. The truck on which Garissi and his helpers had been loading the bombs proved to have an additional load of several thousand rounds of much-needed ammunition

so it was a valuable haul. Garissi and the other men connected with the robbery of the bombs were snugly ensconced in jail, waiting trial.

The uprising was over within a week. The failure of important reinforcements, plus the news that the federal government meant business with the bombs, effectually dampened the enthusiasm of the rebels. The Saturday following his departure from Langham found Russ dropping his big Martin into the airdrome, Jimmy Jennings beside him and a new rudder in back of him.

Russ had fought his fight back there in Charleston during long hours when he had nothing to occupy his mind, and he had come to a decision. Without saying anything to anybody about it, he sent in his resignation, with a request for speedy action. He did write to Bluefield, and the letter he received in return almost compensated him for the queer tightening of the throat which afflicted him whenever he thought of the separation ahead.

It had not been easy—even if he did know, in his inmost heart, that his duty was alongside his father, relieving him of the growing burdens which would inevitably wear him down. The time had come to turn a deaf ear to the call of high adventure which bade him stick to his beloved service. He knew that.

Nevertheless, there were hot tears in his eyes as he said good-bye to the dumbfounded coterie of lean, clear-eyed flyers with whom he had gone through a thousand experiences—cadet days at Donovan,

crowded years on the border, those last few weeks of strained, adventurous effort at Langham. Tex MacDowell, Jimmy Jennings, Fred Ridgeway, and the rest gripped his hand until it was almost squeezed dry of blood, and as is the way of their kind did not ask any reason for his decision. Their "Happy Landings, old-timer!" were ringing in his ears as he stumbled out the door and into the waiting taxi.

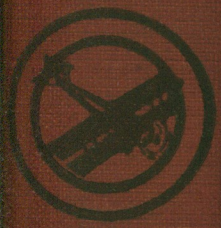
A single DeHaviland was limned against the sky above Langham. It spiralled down with lazy grace, and dropped out of sight behind the hangars as Russ left the field. It seemed a symbol of the way in which this wonderful epoch of his life was dropping behind his mental horizon. Then his thoughts raced ahead. Five o'clock in the afternoon, and the streets of Bluefield would be pleasantly animated. Henry's drugstore would be doing a rushing business at the soda fountain. The square would be banked with cars, and up and down the tree-shaded streets there would be porchfuls of lounging young people. His father's factory would be preparing to close down for the day, and his mother would be waiting on the porch, rocking placidly, watching for Father to come home——

A warmth which was more than consciousness that he was being true to his duty in the highest sense swept over him, and suddenly it seemed that he could not get home fast enough.

THE END

RUSS FARRELL, AIRMAN

BURTIS



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